


AMAL KUMAR DAS
MANIS KUMAR RAHA

SPECIAL
SERIES NO. 3

**THE
ORĀONS
OF
SUNDERBAN**





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THE ORAONS OF SUNDERBAN

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THE ORĀONS OF SUNDERBAN

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FOREWORD

In presenting this volume "The Orāons of Sunderban" to the readers we owe them an apology about its title. After the monumental study on the Orāons by the late Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy, another book on the subject may seem superfluous. But soon after the Cultural Research Institute took up field investigation of the several tribes that are found in West-Bengal, it became apparent that due to migration and slow acculturation there have been different patterns of social mobilities in different tribes subjective to different environs. A base line study of each tribe at the present time was therefore found necessary, and the present volume is the second of this series of publications that have been planned. This volume presents an up-to-date account of the different aspects of the life and culture of the Orāons in the Sunderbans whose forefathers migrated to this part of the country from Ranchi and its neighbourhood, about a century ago. Attempts have been made to determine the extent of deviation in their traditional culture and the causes that have influenced such deviation.

We are thankful to our readers for their appreciation of the earlier volume, "The Lepchas of Darjeeling District" and we hope that the present volume will also be received by the readers in the same kind manner.

Calcutta,
1963.

D. Majumder,
Director, Tribal Welfare,
Government of West Bengal.

INTRODUCTION

The Southern portion of the district of 24-Parganas in West Bengal, popularly known as the *Sunderban* remained practically devoid of human settlements for centuries permitting the growth and development of dense forests infested with dangerous wild and aquatic animals on land and in the rivers. As the pressure of population in Bengal increased, the greedy eyes of human beings fell on this rich tract of virgin forest and attempts were made to reclaim this virgin soil of estuarine Bengal, make the land cultivable and convert it into flourishing settlements. As suitable labour force for this reclamation work was not procurable from nearby regions, workers had to be obtained from other regions, mostly from the tribal areas of the Chotā-Nāgpur Plateau. The most important among them were the Orāons, the Mundās and the Bhumijas. These migrated labourers gradually started settling in this newly reclaimed region as agriculturists.

The Orāons, who formed a considerable portion of these migrant labourers constitute numerically a large section of the tribal population of India. Due to hard economic pressures in their original homeland, they migrated to different adjacent States (such as West-Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Madhya Pradesh etc.) as tea-garden labourers, colliery labourers, indigo-plantation labourers and ordinary labourers. It is this hard economic pressure that forced some of them to migrate as labourers, a few generations ago, to the Sunderban area for reclamation work. After reclamation work, they gradually settled here forming different villages in the southern and the south-eastern portions of 24-Parganas. The descendants of these original settlers gradually lost all socio-religious communion etc. with their kith and kin of Bihar and built up a distinct social group in this area, the patterning and functioning of which have greatly been influenced by the physical and social environ-

ment of this new area. Here they have been residing in comparatively small numbers surrounded by dominating castes and communities, having no communication with the kith and kin of their motherland for generations and this has further accelerated the process of change of their original culture.

The present study, which was carried on during 1962-63 among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, was mainly undertaken to find out the pattern of their life and activities in this region and to throw some light on the changes that have been brought about by migration, contact, new environment etc. as compared to their congeners in Bihar. When a group of migrated people settles in a new environment, it gradually accumulates local values and traditions which on the other hand slowly replace their original traditional beliefs and customs etc. This process is further accelerated if the migrant group breaks off connection with its parent stock, living in their original habitat. The same thing happened with the Orāons of the Sunderban area. These people settled in this area surrounded by a number of influential Hindu and Muslim castes and communities, from whom they imbibed a number of new traits gradually. They could not avert the influence of the neighbouring castes and communities as in course of time they ceased to have any ethno-social relation with their kinsmen of the Ranchi area. It is for these reasons that a study on these people was considered necessary.

For the purpose of this study, several villages in the Sandeshkhali Police Station of 24-Parganas district were selected as 32.8% of the total Orāon population of this district reside here. These villages are Boyarmari, Nazat, Metekhali, Akhratala, Nityabere, Choto-Saira, Ghosepur, Kalinagar, Kanmari, Bhallakhali and Dheknamari.

This study has also provided an opportunity for the study of the impact of urbanisation on them, as these villages where they live, are mostly situated in the borderline of urban and rural centres. The urban centres like Calcutta, Basirhat, Barasat etc. are not far away, and from the southern side of these villages the boundaries of most of the rural tracts of 24-Parganas start.

For the convenience of the readers not familiar with many local terms used in the text, a glossary of the important terms is given in Appendix—I along with the meaning and significance thereof, though in many cases the local terms have been explained as far as possible in the text itself.

Lastly, it is considered necessary to gratefully acknowledge the help and co-operation of the inhabitants of the villages where the study was conducted and particularly of the numerous informants without whose assistance the field study could not have been so successfully conducted. Thanks are also due to Sm. Ila Dey, Sri Probodh Chandra Roy and Sri Swapan Kumar Banerjee of this Institute for their sincere services and ungrudging co-operation in having this monographic study published in such a short time.

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THE ORĀONS
OF
SUNDERBAN

CHAPTER 1

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE ORĀONS OF SUNDERBAN

1. DISTRIBUTION OF ORĀONS IN INDIA:

The total population of India according to 1961 Census is 43,90,72,893 of which 2,98,83,470 belong to Scheduled Tribes forming 6.8%. In 1951 Orāons numbered 10.3 lakhs in India forming 4.57% of the total scheduled tribe population. The distribution of these Orāons in different States of India was as follows :—

TABLE—I¹

<i>State</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Bihar	6,44,374	62.62
Madhya Pradesh	80,705	7.84
Orissa	97,701	9.50
West Bengal	2,06,296	20.04
<hr/> Total <hr/>	<hr/> 10,29,076 <hr/>	<hr/> 100.00 <hr/>

Besides the above States, these people were also found in Tripura (Tippera), but unfortunately the figure thereof has not been available. From the above we find that about

62.62% of the total Orāon population lived in Bihar, 20.04% in West Bengal and the rest shared by other States.

According to 1961 Census the total scheduled tribe population in West Bengal is 20,54,081 (forming 6.9% of the total scheduled tribe population of India i.e. 2,98,83,470) of which the number of Orāons is 2,97,394 (14.5%).

2. DISTRIBUTION OF ORĀONS IN WEST BENGAL²:

In different districts of West Bengal the Orāons are distributed in varying numbers as shown in Table II.

TABLE—II

Districtwise distribution of the Orāons in West Bengal

Districts	Total Population (1961)			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Person	Perce- tage	variation from 1872-1961
Bankura	14	535	549	0.2	422.8
Birbhum	129	140	269	0.1	—95.0
Burdwan	4,452	1,247	5,699	1.9	475.1
Calcutta	255	68	323	0.1	X
Cooch-Behar	1,274	1,036	2,310	0.8	X
Darjeeling	14,975	13,413	28,388	9.5	1,622.5
Hooghly	2,837	906	3,743	1.3	} 800.4
Howrah	1,287	607	1,894	0.6	
Jalpaiguri	93,001	88,748	1,81,749	61.1	40,021.1
Māldā	2,408	2,375	4,783	1.6	51.1
Midnapur	2,369	2,219	4,588	1.5	769.0
Murshidabad	759	586	1,345	0.5	—78.0
Nadia	4,968	4,826	9,794	3.3	3,596.0
Purulia	3,081	2,185	5,266	1.7	X
West-Dinajpur	11,271	11,016	22,287	7.5	714.9
24-Parganas	13,212	11,195	24,407	8.3	626.0
Total	1,56,292	1,41,102	2,97,394	100.0	1,082.0

From the above it is found that Jalpaiguri district tops the list with 61.1% of the total Orāon population of West Bengal. Next to Jalpaiguri come Darjeeling (9.5%), 24-Parganās (8.3%) and West Dinajpur (7.5%). In other districts of West Bengal the percentage of Orāon population is not very remarkable.

Table—II also shows that from 1872 to 1961 the Orāon population in West Bengal has increased by 1,082.0 percent.

In each of the districts except Calcutta, Cooch-Behar and Purulia (the data of which for 1872 are lacking), the Orāon population has increased to a considerable extent so also in Hooghly and Howrah where the consolidated figure for 1872 is available. The maximum percentage of increase is in the district of Jalpaiguri (40,021.1%). This district is followed by Nadia (3,596.0%), Darjeeling (1,622.5%) Hooghly and Howrah jointly (800.4%) and so on. The decrease in percentage is in the districts of Birbhum (95.0%) and Murshidabad (78.0%).

Thus we see that in almost all the districts of West Bengal the Orāon population has increased which is definitely due to the fresh migration in addition to normal growth, migration playing the major role.

3. SEX-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF ORĀON POPULATION IN 24-PARGANĀS.³

In 24-Parganas, the total number of Orāons is 24,407, of which 13,240 are males and 11,167 females. The sex-ratio is 843 i.e. for every 1000 males there are 843 females.

Again of the total Orāon population of 24-Parganas, 21,858 live in rural areas and only 2,549 live in different urban centres.

In 24-Parganās, the Census Report of 1872 returned 3,362, 5,931 in 1901, 12,055 in 1911, 13,424 in 1921, 16,021 in 1931, 12,908 in 1941 and 20,428 in 1951. The figures for 1881 and 1891 are not available as districtwise figures for these two census years are not given. All the Censuses from 1872 to 1961 (ex-

cluding 1881 and 1891) show a considerable increase of Orāon population except in 1941. The high increase of this population from 1901 to 1911 (103.25%) is obviously due mostly to migration.

Table—III shows the distribution of Orāon population in different sub-divisions of 24-Parganas district as per census, 1961.

TABLE III
Sex-wise Distribution of Orāon Population in 24-Parganas by Sub-Division, Police Station and Rural-Urban Tracts

I		II	III	IV	V
District, Sub-division, Police station and Rural-Urban tracts.		Person	Male	Female	Sex-ratio (Females per 1000 males.)
District 24-Parganas	T	24,407	13,240	11,167	843
	R	21,858	11,647	10,211	876
	U	2,549	1,593	956	600
<i>A. Sadar Sub-Division</i>	T	5,489	2,906	2,583	889
	R	4,797	2,417	2,380	985
	U	692	489	203	415
<i>Rural</i>					
1. Basanti P.S.		930	435	495	
2. Baruipur P.S.		143	57	86	
3. Bhangar P.S.		305	116	189	
4. Budge Budge P.S.		77	22	55	
5. Canning P.S.		1,120	613	507	
6. Kultali P.S.		876	526	350	
7. Mahestala P.S.		199	56	143	
8. Sonarpur P.S.		1,033	553	480	
9. Tollygunge P.S.		114	39	75	
<i>Urban</i>					
1. Bansdroni		79	79	—	
2. Garden Reach		1	1	—	

I		II	III	IV	V
3.	Panchur	161	74	87	
4.	Purba Kutuari	31	12	19	
5.	Rajpur	101	71	30	
6.	South Suburban	319	252	67	
B.	Basirhat Sub-Division	T 11,160	5,960	5,200	872
		R 11,089	5,951	5,138	863
		U 71	9	62	6,889
<i>Rural</i>					
1.	Baduria P.S.	261	156	105	
2.	Gosaba P.S.	945	486	459	
3.	Haroa P.S.	59	59	—	
4.	Hasnabad P.S.	522	309	213	
5.	Hingalgunj P.S.	341	191	150	
6.	Minakhan P.S.	934	732	202	
7.	Sandeshkhali P.S.	8,024	4,015	4,009	
8.	Swarupnagar P.S.	3	3	—	
<i>Urban</i>					
1.	Basirhat	71	9	62	
C.	Barasat Sub-Division	T 2,819	1,683	1,136	675
		R 2,086	1,265	821	649
		U 733	418	315	753
<i>Rural</i>					
1.	Amdanga P.S.	441	269	172	
2.	Barasat P.S.	802	520	282	
3.	Habra P.S.	723	416	307	
4.	Rajarhat P.S.	120	60	60	
<i>Urban</i>					
1.	Barasat	220	105	115	
2.	Gobordanga	27	23	4	
3.	Habra	90	43	47	
4.	Madhyamgram	396	247	149	
D.	Bangaon Sub-Division	T 1,958	1,026	932	908
		R 1,958	1,026	932	908
		U —	—	—	—

I		II	III	IV	V
<i>Rural</i>					
1.	Bagda P.S.	724	359	365	
2.	Bangaon P.S.	1,094	574	520	
3.	Gaighata P.S.	140	93	47	
E.	<i>Barrackpur</i>	T	2,829	1,590	1,239
	<i>Sub-Division</i>	R	1,776	913	863
		U	1,053	677	376
<i>Rural</i>					
1.	Bijpur P.S.	1	1	—	
2.	Dum Dum P.S.	113	56	57	
3.	Jagatdal P.S.	380	208	172	
4.	Khardah P.S.	513	229	284	
5.	Naihati P.S.	495	280	215	
6.	Titagarh P.S.	274	139	135	
<i>Urban</i>					
1.	Baranagar	4	4	—	
2.	Bhatpara	70	64	6	
3.	Barrackpur	368	228	140	
4.	North Barrackpur	196	87	109	
5.	North Dum Dum	5	—	5	
6.	Ichapur Defence Estate	2	2	—	
7.	Khardah	17	17	—	
8.	Kamarhati	37	33	4	
9.	Panihati	354	242	112	
F.	<i>Diamond Harbour</i>	T	152	75	77
	<i>Sub-Division</i>	R	152	75	77
		U	—	—	—
<i>Rural</i>					
1.	Diamond Harbour P.S.	8	8	—	
2.	Falta P.S.	52	27	25	
3.	Mathurapur P.S.	89	37	52	
4.	Patharpratima P.S.	3	3	—	

Table—III shows that Basirhat sub-division of 24-Parganas district has the highest concentration of the Orāons (45.7%)

of which the largest number is found in the Sandeshkhali police station (71.9%).

4. ETHNIC ENVIRONMENT OF THE SANDESHKHALI POLICE STATION.⁴

In the Sandeshkhali police station the total population is 1,24,209 (all rural) of which 47,363 are scheduled castes and 31,830 scheduled tribes. Of the total population, 1,03,703 profess Hindu religion, 20,221 are Muslims, 285 Christians and none declared having the tribal religion.

Table IV (p-8) gives the distribution of a number of important scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in this police station who live in close contact with the Orāons. This will help in giving some idea regarding the ethnic environment in the midst of which the Orāons of this area live.

Of the total population in the Sandeshkhali Police Station as revealed from Table—IV (p-8), 38.7% belong to scheduled caste and 25.6% to scheduled tribe communities.

Table IV (p-8) shows that the Orāons live surrounded by a number of scheduled tribes and mostly by the scheduled and the non-scheduled castes and communities. Of the scheduled tribes, the Mundas are by far the largest in number and are followed by the Orāons, Bhumijas and Santals. Of the scheduled castes, the Podṣ or Poundra Kshatriyas are the highest in number followed by the Namasudras, Bagdis, Bhuiyās, Rājbanis and the Kaorās. Besides the above scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, these Orāons also come in regular contact with a number of people belonging to different higher castes (Bengalee) and Muslims in their day-to-day life.

5. GEOGRAPHY OF THE DISTRICT OF 24-PARGANAS

The district of 24-Parganas forms the South-Western portion of the Presidency Division of West Bengal and lies between 21°31' and 22°57' north latitudes and between 88°2' and 89°6' east longitudes. The area of land of this district

varies according to different authorities. The Surveyor General of India mentions that it is over 5,292.8 sq. miles whereas

TABLE IV

Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste Population in Sandeshkhali Police Station

Community	Total Population	Percentage distribution
A. <i>SCH. TRIBES</i>	31,830	100
1. Mundā	15,216	47.8
2. Orāon	8,024	25.2
3. Bhumij	5,000	15.7
4. Santāl	2,458	7.7
5. Korā	312	1.0
6. Mahali	253	0.8
7. Others	567	1.8
B. <i>SCH. CASTES</i>	47,363	100
1. Poundra Kshatriya (Pod)	28,211	59.6
2. Namasudra	4,435	9.4
3. Bāgdi	4,083	8.6
4. Bhuiyā	2,617	5.5
5. Rajbanshi	2,231	4.7
6. Kaorā	2,013	4.3
7. Ghasi	802	1.6
8. Bind	689	1.5
9. Bedia	525	1.1
10. Muchi	479	1.0
11. Turi	372	0.8
12. Jele-Kaibarta	282	0.6
13. Bhuimāli	116	0.2
14. Karengā	86	0.2
15. Baiti	61	0.1
16. Others	361	0.8
Total	79,193	100

the Director of Land Records and Surveys gives the figure as 5639.9 sq. miles, of which 1,630 sq. miles constitute part of Sunderbans. The total population according to the Census of 1961, of this district is 62,80,915. "The name of this district was derived from the number of *Parganas* or fiscal divisions, comprised in the Zamindari of Calcutta which was ceded to the East India Company in 1757 by Mir Jafar, Nawab Nazim of Bengal."⁵

(A) PHYSICAL CONDITION

With an irregular parallelogram shape, this district is bounded by the district of Nadia and Jessore district of East Pakistan on the north, Khulna district of East Pakistan on the east, Bay of Bengal on the south and the river Hooghly on the west.

It lies in the alluvial plain of the Gangetic delta, a little above the flood level. By its physical conditions, this district may be divided into two distinct divisions, (i) the northern inland tract which is a fairly well raised delta land of old formation (ii) the low lying Sunderbans towards the sea-facing south. The former region is the land of sluggish or stagnant rivers whereas in the Sunderbans there is a network of tidal channels, rivers, creeks and islands.

In the past, almost all the rivers of this district were the distributories of the Ganges. The three Gangetic distributories i.e. the Bhagirathi, the Jalangi and the Māthābhānga convey a large volume of flood water to the Hooghly. The Ichāmati carries a portion of flood water from Māthābhāngā. The principal rivers of this district are Hooghly, Bidyādhari, Piāli and Jamunā, but practically each river forms the centre of a minor system of interlacing distributaries of its own. There are a number of estuaries, piercing through the Sunderbans, which are tidal waterways.

(B) SOIL TYPE AND CLASSIFICATION OF LAND

The surface of this district is made up with alluvium of great depth. The surface soil close to the Hooghly is a hard clayey

loam (*Entel*) while in the northern part of the district sandy loam (*Pali*) predominates. The eastern and central parts bear chiefly clayey loam while the Sunderbans is formed by heavy clay impregnated with salt.

The soils of this district in general may be classified into the following.⁶

- (1) *Matial* or clayey soil
- (2) *Dorāsā* or *Donāsh* or loamy soil
- (3) *Baliā* or sandy soil
- (4) *Nonā* or saline soil.

But in the Sunderban area slightly different types of soils are found. Due to difference of soil types, cultivable land has been classified into different types. These types are:

(i) *Matial*, a clayey soil, whitish in colour, loose and light in composition. This soil is very suitable for the *Pātnā* rice which is abundantly grown in the Sunderban area.

(ii) *Baliārā* or *Dorāsā*—the loamy soil, reddish in colour. Inferior type of paddy is grown here.

(iii) *Dhāp* or *Churā*, whitish in colour and is of higher level than other types. Due to its high level salt is not washed out unless heavy rain, and consequently no crops are generally grown.

(iv) *Dhāl*—is the lowest type of land and flooded in rain. It is reddish in colour, cracks when dry and not much suitable for cultivation throughout the year.

Besides the above classifications, another local classification of cultivable land is recognised in the Sandeshkhali Police Station. According to this classification cultivable lands are mainly grouped into:—

(i) *Tākāyā* or the uppermost level: This type of land is comparatively less fertile.

(ii) *Nābāl* or intermediate level: It is more fertile than the previous one.

(iii) *Dhāpā* or lowest land: This is the most fertile land consisting of the least amount of salt. This type of land gives maximum yield.

(C) LAND TENURE SYSTEM

The land tenure system of 24-Parganas may be divided into the following two main divisions. —

- (i) the permanently settled areas, and
- (ii) the Sunderban reclaimed areas.

In the former division it may be said that the Zeminders firstly induced the tenants to occupy fully their lands and then created tenures between themselves and the tenants, whereas, in the Sunderban area a different picture may be noticed. "From the time of Claude Russel (1771) grants of land were made from the jungle areas to different lessees with the view that the reclamation of jungle should be considered first, then cultivation; and for this purpose a revenue-free period was granted. The lessees, in order to relax the great responsibility and anxiety, divided their grant areas into several portions and again leased to different tenants."

In this way tenancy and land-holding right in this area were established.

The land administration of this area has been taking shape from the date of the reclamation. The lessees commonly known as *lotdārs* to whom the land-grants were made are the proprietors or the tenure holders. These *lotdārs* have in a number of cases sublet their holdings to *chakdārs* who in their turn further sublet to the *rāiyats* and in some cases the *rāiyats* sublet to the *under-rāiyats*.

Besides the above structure, there are *bargādārs* or *bhāg-chāsis* who are share-croppers or landless labourers.

But at present with the abolition of Zemindari system the control on land holding has gone directly over to the Government. At present the land-owners pay taxes directly to the Government as against to the Zaminders or proprietors of land.

(D) FLORA

The vegetation of this forest division is peculiar to this estuarine swamps influenced primarily by the salinity of water and secondarily by the nature of soil, tides and human acti-

vities. The forest region of the Sunderban area includes less saline and more saline areas, and the former includes 'Salt-water Heritiera Forest' whereas the latter 'Low Mangrove Forest'. In the Salt-water Heritiera Forest type the important products are *Gengwā*, *Pāssur*, *Bhundal* and *Sundari*. *Keorā*, *Bāen*, *Garjan*, *Kakrā*, *Orā*, *Torā*, *Golpātā* etc. are also not unknown. In the Low Mangrove Forest type, the trees are almost identical with the former one except that the *Sundari* and *Golpātā* are absent.

Various types of plantation are found in the jungle of Sunderban and other parts of this district. Of these the following are worth mentioning:—

- Binā*—*Avicennia officinalis*.
- Samundra*—*Barringtonia racemosa*.
- Bolā Sundari*—*Brownloia lanceolata*.
- Sundari*—*Heritiera minor*.
- Gorān*—*Ceriops roxburghiana*.
- Garjan*—*Dipterocarpus turbinatus*.
- Bāen*—*Avinicia officianalis*.
- Pāssur*—*Xylocarpa granatum*.
- Golpātā*—*Nipa fructican*.
- Bāblā*—*Acacia arabica*.
- Coconut*—*Cocos nucifera*.
- Khejur* (date palm)—*Phoenix sylvestris*.
- Tāl* (Palmyra palm)—*Borassus flabelifer*.
- Kul*—*Zizyphus jujuba*.
- Ām* (Mango)—*Mangifera indica*.
- Kānthāl* (Jackfruit)—*Artocarpus integrifolia*.
- Keorā*—*Sonneratia apetala*.
- Orā*—*Sonneratia acida*.
- Hintāl*—*Phoenix paludosa*.

(E) FAUNA

The following are a few characteristic fauna of the Sunderban area:—

1. Barking Deer—*Munticus muntijux*—Zimm.

2. Monkey—*Macaca mulatta mulatta*—Zimmarmann.
3. Tiger—*Panthera tigris tigris*—Linn.
4. Panther—*Panthera pardus*—Linn.
5. Jungle Cat—*Felis Chaus*—Guld.
6. Fishing Cat—*Prionailurus viverrinus*—Bennett.
7. (i) Large Indian civets—*Viverra Zibetha*—Linn.
(ii) Small Indian Civets—*Viverricula Indica Bengalensis*—Gray.
8. Toddy Cat *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*—Schr.
9. (i) The Jackal—*Canis aureus*—Linn.
(ii) The Bengal Fox—*Vulpes Bengalensis*—Shaw.
10. (i) The Common Otter—*Lutra lutra*—Linn.
(ii) The Smooth Otter—*Lutra ellioti*—Anderson.
(iii) The Clawless Otter—*Amblonyx civerca*.
11. The Spotted Deer—*Axis axis* Erxl.
12. (i) Marsh Crocodile—*Crocodylus palustris*—Lesson.
(ii) Estuarine Crocodile—*Crocodylus porosus*.
13. Wild Pig—*Sus cristatus* Wagn.

Besides the above, various species of birds are found in the jungle, and fishes including sharks, porpois, crabs and tortoise in water-sources. Varieties of snakes are found in both land and water.

(F) CLIMATE

The climatic condition of 24-Parganas is somewhat tropical in nature. In summer it is hot and damp and in winter cold and dry. The amount of rain-fall is above medium. In winter from November to January even to February the sky remains almost clear resulting in the absence of rain-fall. From November to January the temperature which continues to fall with the rise of humidity to a higher level, begins to increase in February. Afterwards southern wind accompanies the advancing year with a period of transition characterised by occasional thunder, storms and rains.

In May, monsoon impregnated with cyclonic storms breaks near the head of the Bay. Unusually heavy rain attends at

long intervals. In the latter half of June South-West monsoon emerges but sometimes it is deferred till the beginning of July when humidity increases to 90% at saturation. The mean temperature slowly diminishes from June to October, so also the rate of rainfall from September onwards. In May and October-November severe cyclones occur and cause particular devastations.

During rains most parts of this district are flooded causing great harm to the crops and beings, but helps in washing away salts from the cultivable lands.

The total annual rainfall varies from 60" to 70" with an average of 6.56" per month. In the months of June and July the rainfall is maximum which varies from 14" to 18" monthly. The minimum average temperature is 64°F, which is the least in the month of January-February when temperature varies from 43°F to 49°F. The maximum average temperature is 94.2°F, which reaches its highest in the months from April to June when the temperature varies from 100°F to 107°F, and afterwards it again decreases with the advent of monsoon.

6. ORIGIN AND MIGRATION OF THE ORĀONS:

The Orāons of this area of Sunderban migrated from the Ranchi area. When asked about their original home every one speaks of Chota-Nagpur, but none can give out the exact position of his origin and tradition. In this regard we are totally dependant on the theories of earlier authors who worked among these people of Bihar. According to Roy, "the traditions of the people (Orāons) point to the Deccan as their original home" (1915: 17). He supports his theory on counting the opinion of the philologists who have shown the similarity of the *Kūrukh* language (which is the mother tongue of the Orāons) with the Tamulian languages and these two languages have been grouped by Caldwell⁸ under the generic name Dravidian. He further remarks that in the primitive stage of savagery "the forefathers of the Orāons once lived in the hills and hill-caves of Southern India, wandering about,

ill-clad and ill-armed, winning as best as they could a precarious subsistence from the hill and the forest.” (1915 : 27).

Citing references from *Rāmāyaṇa*, the famous epic of the Hindus, Roy says, “it is not unreasonable to conclude that the forefathers of the Orāons had the monkey for their tribal totem, and formed part of the aboriginal army of the Aryan hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*”. (1915 : 23-24).

Dalton⁹ is, also, of opinion that the traditions of the Orāons connect them with the western coast of India either with Gujrat or with Konkan, the lowland strip along the western portion of the Bombay Presidency (the present Maharashtra) lying between the range of the Western Ghats and the sea as their cradleland. This theory of Dalton was accepted by Caldwell.¹⁰ Tracing their tradition, Gait¹¹ is of opinion that they came from the Carnatic up the *Narmada* river and settled in Bihar on the banks of the Son.

Due to pressure from various forces, they are said to have wandered eastward along the central range of hills forming the backbone of the Peninsula. “There, with their newly acquired knowledge of agriculture, they gradually settled down on the fertile valleys of some great rivers like the *Narmadā*”¹² for a while and thence moved towards Northern India due to overpopulation or external pressure or some other reasons, and lastly settled in the Rhotas plateau of Kaikur hills in Shahabad district. During the Muhammadan invasion they were forced out from this settled habitat, and are said to have been split up into two divisions and to have moved in two different paths—one under the leadership of their chief settled at the Rajmahal hills after making their journey through the course of the Ganges and the other led by the younger brother of the chief, took possession of the north-east portion of the plateau of ChotāNāgpur after following the route through the valley of Son, Palamau and the bank of the river Koel. The authors like S. C. Roy, E. T. Dalton¹³ etc. say that the Māle or Māler and the Pāhirā tribes of the Rajmahal hills are closely connected with the Orāons and speak an allied language (1915 : 11-12). But Dr. S. S. Sarkar¹⁴ dif-

fers in opinion. "When, centuries ago, they entered the Chotā-Nāgpur Plateau, these tribesmen of ancient King Karakh, and kinsmen of the Canārese of the ancient Pāndya kingdom of Korakai, found the country occupied by tribes ruder than themselves' (Roy : 1915 : 5). Of these tribes Birhors, Korwās Mundās etc. were worth mention who were at that time mainly hunters or herdsmen or knew rudimentary methods of agriculture.

As the new comers were technologically superior and better equipped, they could easily defeat them and exert influence over the earlier inhabitants.

Reaching the north-east portion of the plateau of Chotā-Nāgpur, they found that the territory was already occupied by the Mundās. For a period of time they lived in tolerable amity with the Mundās who were considered by them as less advanced. "But with their comparatively superior equipment for the struggle for existence, their comparatively better intelligence, better knowledge of agriculture, and their rapid multiplication due perhaps to better food secured through agriculture, they (Orāons) became gradually predominant in the north-western and central parts of the plateau, and made extensive clearances which they brought under plough" (Roy : 1915 : 37). Due to this increased importance and strength of these strangers, "the conservative Mundās, so long sole masters of the country, were too proud to brook rivalry, and retreated in hauteur to the southern and eastern parts of the plateau". (Roy : 1915 : 37). This victory of the Orāons was not a victory of arms or of physical strength, "but of improved tools and of qualities like patience, industry and perseverance which have survival-value in the struggle for material existence". (Roy : 1915 : 38).

The Orāons, thus, occupied this territory though in some of the villages the relics of old Mundā culture are still available.

After leading a settled life for a good length of time, some of them started migrating seasonally and/or permanently to different urbanised, industrialised or tea-plantation areas of

Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and of Madhya-Pradesh as labourers, due to economic hardships and other socio-political reasons.

A few of such batches of Orāons were brought over to this area of Sunderbans a few generations ago from Chotā-Nāgpur for reclaiming the jungle tracts of the Deltaic Bengal by the then authorities of this area.

Later on, they were given patches of land over which they built up their own villages and started their old profession i.e. agriculture utilising the mid-intervals to supplement their earning by working as day labourers, and this day-labour is still a secondary means of occupation to a number of them. The Orāons and the Mundās of Boyārmari, Nazāt, Metekhāli, Ākhrātālā, Ghosepur, Kālinagar and also of other neighbouring village of the Sandeshkhali police station narrated that their forefathers were brought over here by the then Zeminders of the respective areas. Gradually a number of settlements grew up here, and these new groups started functioning here as a new tribal congregation. This type of migration, according to Solien De Gonzalex,¹⁵ falls under the category of *Permanent Removal*.

The Orāons migrated to the Sunderban area about three to four generations ago i.e. about seventy five to hundred years ago.

Further, the present day descendants of these migrated Orāons cannot be said to be continuing their settlement in the particular place where their forefathers first started settling as many of them shifted from village to village before permanently settling down in their present day habitat.

7. ORIGIN OF THE NAME :

Regarding the origin of the name, *Kurukh* or *Orāon*, none of the Orāons of this region could throw any light. In this matter also we have to depend on the earlier records. The Orāons (mainly of Chotā-Nāgpur) call themselves (in their language) as *Kurukh*. According to Roy, the origin of the name *Kurukh* may be traced to one of their mythical hero-kings called *Kayakh*. He, also suggests the probability of the

origin of this name from *Karus-dés*, the ancient name of their former home i.e. Shāhābād (1915: 3). But in Buchanan's¹⁶ version, "Another *Daitya*¹⁷ named *Karakh* of those remote times, is said to have had possession of the country between the Son and the Karmanasa, which was then called *Karukh-Des*". Grignard¹⁸ identified the *Kūrukhs* with the *Karus* people, the Raksasas of Sanskrit literature. But Roy rejected this theory. Gait suggested to Roy about the probability of the origin of this word *Kurukh* from some now obsolete Dravidian root meaning *man* (Roy: 1915: 4). "Probably this name may have been given to the mythical king *Karakh* just in the same way as the name *Adam* was given to the Hebrew progenitor of mankind or *Manu* to Hindu progenitor of mankind (*manava*)" (1915: 4). Another suggestion was given by Roy. In this case he traced out the close resemblance to the Sanskrit root *Kṛs*, to plough, and he did not ignore the resemblance of the name with *Kṛsak* or *Kṛsān* though there is doubt in the Sanskrit origin of the name of the king *Karukh* and his country *Kāruk-des*. He states, "And this similarity of names may not improbably have helped the Orāons in their adoption or retention of the name *Kurukh*" (1915: 5).

Dalton¹⁹, tracing the origin of the name *Kūrukhs*, found the basis from *Konkon* whereas Hahn²⁰ identified it with the Kolarian *Horo*, man or with the Dravidian-Scythian word *Kūrukhs* meaning a cry-er. Grierson²¹ doubtfully suggested the Dravidian word *Kurugu* i.e. an eagle, which may be a name of their totemistic clan, as the source of origin.

In connection with the name *Dhāngar*, Roy cites references from Walter Hamilton's²² book *Description of Hindostan* (1820) where he writes, "The *Khetauri*, the *Koeri* and the *Dhānggar*, are still the principal inhabitants of Chotā-Nāgpur. The *Dhanggar* are still impure, as probably unconverted *Mlechchas*" (1915: 9).

Dalton²³ points out, "The *Kurukh* or Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur are the people best known in many parts of India as *Dhāngars*". But Roy points out that this name is recognised not only by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur but also by those living in different other parts of Bihar and of Orissa. According

to him, "an unmarried Orāon is called *Jonkh* in the Orāon language, and *Dhāngar* in local Hindi" and "thus the dormitory for bachelors in Orāon is called a '*Jonkh Erpa*, and also a *Dhāngar-bāsā*". (1915: 8).

Regarding the origin of the name *Orāon*, Hahn²⁴ holds the view that the name Orāon was coined by the Hindus probably from the word *Orgora*, meaning *hawk*, a totemistic sept of the Orāons. "Dr. Grierson compares the name with *Kaikadi Urapai* man, *Burgandi*, *urapo*, man, *Urang* men, and goes on to observe, 'the Hindus say that the word *Oraon* is simply the Indo-Aryan *Uran*, spendthrift, the name being an allusion to the alleged thriftless character of the people to whom it is applied" (Roy: 1915: 13). Due to their extraordinary prolificness and monstrously impure habits, as Roy thinks, these people came to be called *Rāonā-pūt* or the progeny of *Rāwana*, from which the term *O-rāwan* or *Orāon* was derived (1915: 14). Citing a mythical story, as told by some of his informants, regarding the origin of these people, he says, "Thus, then, the *Bhāyā-Bhayin*, the first parents of the Orāons, having been born of the blood of the chest (Sanskrit, *Uras* or *Ur*) of the holy ascetic, their descendants came to be known as *Urāgon Thākurs* or *Urāons*. And in those olden days they were quite as respectable as the Brahmins, and wore the sacred thread. When, later, the Orāons fell from their high state, and began to eat indiscriminately whatever food, clean or unclean, that came to hand, they forfeited their claim to the name *Urāgon Thākurs*, and came to be called simply *Orāons*" (1915: 16). Roy has found out significant similarity of this story with that given in the *Rāmāyana* (Uttara Kānda, XLII, 7—12) concerning the origin of *Sugriva*, king and leader of the *Vānara* (monkey) followers of Rāma Chandra; and from this Roy confirms his suggestion that the Orāons formed part of the monkey soldiers of Rāma Chandra (1915: 16).

8. A SHORT HISTORY AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL POSITION OF THE SUNDERBAN AREA.

The southern, south-eastern and south-western por-

tions of 24-Parganās district including the part of Jaynagar and of Canning police stations in the Sadar sub-division, Sandeshkhali, Gosaba and Hasnabad police stations in the Basirhat sub-division and Mathurapur and Sagar police stations in the Diamond Harbour sub-division may be said as comprising the present day Sunderban areas of West Bengal though the famous forest Sunderban is only restricted to the southern-most portion. Most portions of the Sunderban area have been cleared and are being utilised as cultivable lands. It is rather difficult for any person now-a-days to guess what was previously the condition of the then virgin forest of this area wherein one dared not entering even in day time. The sun-rays even possibly could not penetrate some of these dense forest areas. The tigers roared, the deer barked and the crocodiles rested on the banks. Numerous birds made the sky noisy. The bees built their honey-combs on the branches of the trees. This was the picture even a hundred or hundred and fifty years ago. But gradually this picture of Sunderban has changed and the area has been denuded of most of these features.

According to the Commissioner of the Sunderban,²⁵ the whole area (4,820,843 acres or 7533 sq. miles) has been classified into (1) The area at present set apart for reclamation purposes and leased out, amounting to 1,076,030 acres or 1,681 square miles. Out of this area of land, 6,89,983 acres or 1,078 square miles are cultivable and the remaining acreage are uncultivable and under jungle. (2) The unleased forest land covering 2,538,871 acres or 3,967 sq. miles (3) The navigable rivers and creeks 1,205,942 acres or 1,884 square miles.

The following few extracts from the earlier records (vide District Hand-book of 24-Parganās, Census 1951) are furnished below in order to convey some idea regarding the geography and history of Sunderban area of earlier days.

“The Sunderban is the name commonly given to all the southern portion of the delta of the Ganges; but in its stricter sense it means so much of that portion of the delta as was excluded from the Permanent Settlement. The Sunderbans stretch from the Hooghly on the west to the Meghna, the

estuary of the Ganges and Brahmaputra on the east, and comprise the southern portion of the present districts of 24-Parganas, Khulna and Bhakarganj". (pp. cxxxiv)

"The extent of Sunderbans from west to east is 150 miles and its breadth from north to south is about fifty-eight miles. It is bounded on the north by the Zemindaree lands of the districts of 24-Parganas, Krishnanagar, Jessore and of Backhergunge, to the south is the Bay of Bengal, east, the mouths of the Ganges and of the Meghna and west, the Hooghly river". (pp. cxvii)

"Various derivations have been suggested for the word Sunderban but only two appear probable. One is *Sundari*, the *Sundri* tree, and *Ban*, forest, the whole word meaning *the Sundri forest*, and the other, *Samudra* (through its corrupted and vulgar form *Samudar*), the sea, and *ban* forest, the whole meaning *the forest near the sea*. There are two arguments in favour of the former derivation, first, that the *Sundri* tree is the commonest tree there and secondly, that the word sometimes locally pronounced the *Sunderban*. There is one argument in favour of the second derivation, the word *Samudravana*, occurs in Sanskrit authors as meaning large forest tracts near the sea. Another view is that the *Soondarbuns* take their name from two Hindu words, meaning the *Beautiful forest*." (pp. cxxxiv)

"The earliest picture of Sunderban area is depicted in the letter of Mr. Tilman Henckle, the Judge and Magistrate of Jessore and 'Superintendent of Soonderbans', addressed to Hon'ble Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India, dated 21st. December, 1783 in which he also schemed to reclaim and populate this tract of forest.

"That it is practicable to populate this wild and extensive forest, and not a mere speculative idea, we have only to recur to the times of the Mogul Government, and we shall find that prior to the invasion of the Mughls in Bengal, year 1128, these lands were in the finest state of cultivation, and the villages in general well populated. The number of mosques and other places of worship still remaining, fully demonstrate its former splendor and magnificence". (pp. cxviii)

Such has the condition of this area in 12th century. But afterwards due to Mugh invasion the eastern Sunderban became depopulated and the cultivable lands were reincured by the forest with the formation of a thick and dense forest. But the other parts were still populated even in the earlier part of 16th century (1510 to 1520) which is depicted by the *Asia of De Barros*. He has mentioned the names of several towns and villages there. Then passed a long pause. When the East India Company began to rule this state in 1765, a few British administrators felt the utility of clearing this forest and a few of them proposed schemes for it. Prior to Mr. Henckle, Collector-General of 24-Parganas, Mr. Claude Russel appeared with the proposal.

“On the grant of 24-Parganas to the East India Company, the country, even in the vicinity of Calcutta was in a wild and uncultivated state. With the object of reclaiming it, leases were granted by the Collector-General Mr. Claude Russel, to individuals during the years 1770 to 1773. The grants were firstly properly measured in 1783, when a general measurment of 24-Parganas district was carried out. On that measurment was effected the decennial settlement of the district in 1790”. (pp. cxlii)

“The next effort was made by Mr. Tilman Henckell, in 1783. His scheme was to lease out small plots to raiyāts so as to establish a body of independent peasant proprietors holding directly under Government”. (pp. cxxxvi)

He understood the importance of the reclamation of this forest. In his letter to the Hon'ble Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India, dated 21st December, 1783, he wrote:—

“A plan has suggested itself to me, which I am confident, if adopted, would not only eradicate these nest of marauders, but in course of a few years bring a great addition of revenue to Government, I mean that large tract of waste land, called the Sunderbans, appertaining to Jessore, situated between the Roymungul and Horinguttah rivers”. (pp. cxvii)

Afterwards the most arduous and great work was done by Lt. W. E. Morrieson by surveying the Sunderbans (exclusive of the sea face) during the years 1811-1814, the results of

which were corrected by his brother Capt. Hugh Morrieson in 1818. "It introduced certainty where previously all had been chaos, and it has been the basis of all subsequent maps of Sunderbans". (pp. cxxxvi)

In 1814-16 attempts were made to re-measure this area, as a result of which the authorities sanctioned the appointment of the *Commissioner in the Sunderban*, with all the powers and duties of a Collector.

In 1822-23, Mr. Prinsep surveyed the line of the dense forest from the river Jamuna to the Hooghly and "with the aid of the Morrieson's map, he divided all the forest lands between those rivers into blocks and numbered them; this was the beginning of the *Sunderban* lots. (pp. cxxxvi)

In 1831, Lt. Hodges prepared a map which has been the standard map of Sunderbans ever since and in which he divided all the forest as far as river Pasar into 236 blocks, the aggregate area of which was 1,702,420 acres or 2,660 square miles. Beyond the river Pasar no detailed survey and no allotments had been done.

In 1830, the grants of the forest were promulgated. During 1830 and 1831, 98 lots were granted away, and 12 more during the next five years, with a total area of 551,520 acres.

Again another set of rules for the grant of waste lands in the Sunderbans was passed on the 24th of September, 1853. "The clearance of the jungle has been steadily progressing since the passing of the new rules. Out of 178 grants already made, thirty belong to Europeans, one to an Armenian, two to native Christians, thirty to Muhammadans and one hundred and five to Hindus". (pp. cxxi)

"In 1863, the Waste Land Rules were promulgated and under these rules some thirteen lots were allotted in 1865 and 1866". (pp. cxxxviii)

To embank the lands is the first point to be considered in reclamation. After embankment, the regular process of felling the forest, digging tanks and constructing huts for the cultivators and labourers were started. The supply of food and fresh water and the protection from wild animals and

diseases for a strong body of *coolies* (labourers) were also regulated.

“The grantees have not hitherto examined the timber of the Sunderbans, their object has been to get rid of the jungle as speedily as possible and clear the land. There is no doubt the forests contain excellent timber which may be put to a great many uses. But the wood-cutters who are employed by these grantees, cut them without considering their importance. For the reclamation of forests these grantees employed a number of labourers who were Sunderban wood-cutters, coolies from Chotā-Nāgpur and Mugh coolies from the eastern frontier”. (pp. cx)

The labourers brought from Chotā-Nāgpur area belonged to different tribal communities of which Orāon, Mundā, Santāl, Ho, Bhumij, and others are most important one.

“Sometimes the wood-cutters made *aurrang* which meant the headquarter or gathering house; and the man who set up the *aurrang* was called as *geanee*. He marked certain boundary and founded the altar of the various forest deities in a few little huts about the size of dog-kennel after clearing that marked patch and worshipped these deities with offerings and sacrifices in order to free the place of tiger. The *bowlees* or wood-cutters also worshipped these deities in order to get rid of danger. The chief local divinities are the Boy Saint (*Sawal Pir*) and the Forest Lady (*Banbibī*). The other deities are *Badar Sahib*, a saint of the river, *Daksin Roy* (God of the tigers), *Kālu Roy* (God of the crocodiles) etc. (pp. cxxiii)

“In 1876, the forests of 24-Parganas and Khulna came under the Forest Department. The forest of 24-Parganas and that in Khulna were entitled as *protected* and *reserved* respectively. The wood-cutters were allowed to ply their business in the protected forests under passes from the Department, and they were watched by toll-stations established in all the important water passes. These people generally collected timber and fire-wood, *Golpātā* and leaves for thatching roofs and reeds for matting. Other articles obtained from forests by these people are shells, canes etc”. (pp. cxr)

In 1904 Government of Bengal placed before the Government of India definite proposals for the *raiayatwari* settlement for reclamation in the Sunderban areas of 24-Parganas. The work according to this proposal progressed upto 1910 when in the month of September, the State Government finally decided to abandon it mainly for financial reasons. This static condition rested for a period of time when from 1915 new proposals were handled so as to reorient this vast tract of land.

The Sunderban areas are entirely on the alluvial formation and are pierced by large estuaries throughout, especially in the west portion where there are no rivers. The estuaries and rivers run generally north to south. The soil of this area is composed superficially of a black vegetable mud, supporting a tangle mass of tropical vegetation growing down to water's edge and mostly overflowed by every spring tide, the black mud alternates with band of sand, but nowhere sand forms the superficial stratum. Mr. Henckell described the Sunderbans as having been "in the finest state of cultivation at the time of Mughal Government". The rivers and *Khāls* (canals) abound with fish of all kinds and support a large fishing population, and the forests are plenty of sports.

9. THE ORĀON VILLAGES IN THE SUNDERBAN AREA

The Orāon settlement pattern in the Sunderban area may be regarded as linear type. A main road (which, in most of the cases, is unmetalled) generally passes through the heart of the village, and the huts are generally arranged on both the sides of this road.

The villages are generally populated by people belonging to different castes and communities. The inter-ethnic relation may be termed as quite cordial among these different neighbouring groups. In most of the Orāon villages (or at least in nearby villages) one or more families of specialised caste groups having particular economic pursuits such as

potter (*Kumār*), blacksmith (*Kāmār*), grocer (*Mudī*), midwife (*Ghāsi*), basket-maker (*Dom*) and others may be found.

The villages, in most of the cases are composed of a number of *Pārās* or hamlets. In the centre of each village (without hamlet) or hamlet there is village *Thān* (altar) where the village deities are worshipped.

As the settlement pattern is linear, the lanes and bye-lanes are rather few in number. By the side of most of the houses there is a kitchen garden and also a shed for cattle. The cultivable lands are also present encircling the village. During winter and summer, the lanes and bye-lanes remain very dirty and during rainy season these paths become full of mud, which cause much difficulty in using them. Unlike Orāon settlements in Ranchi area, no Orāon village of this area possesses a bachelors' dormitory (*Jonkh erpā* or *Dhumkuria*) and dancing ground (*Ākhrā*).

A number of ponds (*Pukur*) and ditches are found here and there in each village. The people generally use these for daily use (mainly for bathing and washing purposes). These sources also supply fish which supplement their economy. Besides these, in some of the villages, there are a few wells and tube-wells which are used for obtaining water for drinking and cooking purposes.

Some of the Orāon villages are also found to be arranged in a linear fashion just by the side of a river or a canal, and these serve the villagers as the main source of their water-supply.

In this area, the following are the main means by which transportations and communications are generally carried on. Short distances are generally covered by a villager on foot. To cover a long distance they take the help of the cycle, cycle-rickshaw, local taxi, bus, cart etc. The main means of conveyance in water-ways are motor-launch, country boat etc. Thus we see that modern means of communication help the villagers of this area to a great extent. But still most of the villagers are totally dependant on their foot, cart and country boats, as in the most interior areas these modern means of communication have not yet penetrated. However, it may be

said that the means of communication are far better now than what these were a few decades ago.

The environment under which the Orāons of this area live, is quite different from that in their original homeland i.e. Chotā-Nāgpur. The Orāon villages in Chotā-Nāgpur are generally situated on the undulated plateau about 2000 ft. above the sea-level. Due to these undulations, crests and depressions have been formed, and from these crests, terraces are cut out for cultivation. Dense *Sāl* (*Shorea rubasta*) forests are the characteristics there. The Orāons live there in a dry climate with wide range of temperature variation having their villages built generally on the top of the crests. The villages, generally agglomerate in nature (i.e. the houses are huddled together), are very dirty and possess a number of lanes and bye-lanes. In the centre of most of the villages there is a bachelors' dormitory (*Jonkh-Erpā* or *Dhumkuriā*) in front of which there is a dancing ground. Every evening this *akhra* i.e. dancing ground becomes sonorous with music and dance by the young and the unmarried, and at night they repair to their dormitories.

In this connection it may be said that the Orāon bachelors' dormitories now-a-days are mostly confined to the interior villages. In the Sunderban area it is very difficult to find an Orāon who has heard the name of bachelors' dormitory or can narrate the function of the same. But in Ranchi area, if it does not exist in a particular village, still most of the Orāons can tell its functions etc. Most probably in the Sunderban area, the original Orāon migrants did not introduce this in their social and village life due to varied reasons, and for this most of the Orāons of the Sunderban area at present are quite in the dark about one of their most important socio-political institutions.

Thus, it is seen that the present day Orāons of the Sunderban area live in such an environment which does not tally with that of their home-land, and this new environment has played a dominant part in re-orienting their life and culture.

CHAPTER II

MATERIAL CULTURE

1. THE HOUSE

The Orāon houses of this area are mostly four sloped (though a few two sloped or eight sloped houses can also be seen) and the ground plan is either rectangular or square in shape. The walls are mostly made up of beaten earth (sometimes also of bamboo splits plastered with earth). The roofs are mainly thatched with straw on a bamboo frame work and only in a few cases *Khāprā* (country tiles) or leaves (*Golpātā* etc) have been found. All the houses have high plinths (varying in height from 2 feet to 3 feet) and this is mainly for protecting the house from flood water.

Almost all the houses have covered *varandah*, often used for sleeping purpose. The presence of windows in these houses is a rare feature (in a few cases, one or two windows may be found, but these are of very small size). Most of the rooms have only one door, which is made of planks of wood and devoid of any decoration. The facing of the houses is generally away from the main road so as to protect the inside of the house from dust, dirt and the gaze of the passers-by. The inside of the rooms is very dark due to the lack of windows and the smallness of the only door of entry. None of these tribal people has any double-storied building. Almost all the

houses have cattle-shed and shed for poultry by the side of the house but pigsties are few in number. A courtyard is, generally, situated in front of the house which serves as the thrashing ground in the harvest season. The thrashed paddy is stored in the *golās* built on the courtyard. The kitchen-garden (*bāgān*) is generally situated either on the side or at the back of the house.

Sometimes the main room is partitioned into smaller compartments which are used for different purposes such as bedroom, kitchen, cow-shed etc. In most of the cases a lavatory is absent so also any drainage system.

Inside the main hut there are wooden or earthen racks used for keeping house hold utensils. The household furniture pieces are kept in one side of the room. The food-stuff, the paddy seeds etc, are also stored in the same way. The kitchen has one or two ovens and also a platform to keep cooking utensils. In some of the houses oven is also present in the courtyard for cooking purpose. One portion of this main room also serves as the seat for the family deity. At present a few Hinduised Orāons keep *Tulsi-Mancha* (altar consisting of a Basil plant) in the courtyard which also serves the purpose of the seat for family deity.

In most of the cases the main room serves as lying-in-room during delivery of any woman of the house as they do not erect a separate structure as lying-in-room.

When a man starts constructing a house he, first of all, selects the site; and generally a site by the side of the main road or at least by the side of a lane not far away from the main road is preferred. In order to judge the sanctity of the selected site he keeps in the four corners of the plot a few rice grains and covers these by a clod of earth. This is done in the evening of a Saturday or a Tuesday. Next day if he finds all the rice-grains in all the corners intact, the site is regarded as a good one. If not, the corner or corners which is found deficient in number of grains is treated as having evil spirit. In order to get rid of this evil spirit a *Gunin* or *Ojhā* (medicineman or magician) is called who keeps a copper coin over that corner and propitiates *Kālī* (*Kālīsadhanā*) with the

sacrifice of a fowl and by scattering sanctified mustard seeds. At present some of the enlightened Orāons do not observe this rite of site-selection.

After the selection of the site, the foundation is dug out and on the foundation the walls are made by clods or pastes of earth. When the walls are completed, the frame of the roof is made which is afterwards thatched with straw. Lastly the doors and windows, if any, are set. Then the walls and the floor of the house are plastered with a paste of cow dung, earth and water. Where the walls are made up of bamboo splits plastered with mud, the roof of the house is constructed first on a few supporting bamboo poles; then the walls are made. First the bamboo frameworks of the walls are placed which are afterwards plastered thickly with the paste of cowdung, earth and water.

On the day of the first entrance into a newly built house, *Dharma*, (Supreme deity), *Burāburi* (Ancestors) and *Gāon deoti* (village deity) are worshipped with the sacrifice of a fowl. For this, a portion of the western side of the house is selected as altar which is sanctified with the solution of cow-dung, earth and water. Then the *Pāhān* or *Ojhā* (village priest) is called. The *Ojhā*, takes his bath, sits by the side of this altar and pays homage to these deities for the safety, peace and fortune of this house. Then he takes a fowl, utters the name of these deities thrice (first of all, the name of *Dharma* is uttered) and with an incantation sacrifices the fowl. Then with the *āruā* rice of the *pujā* and the sacrificed fowl, *tāhāri* is prepared and is offered to these deities. When this *puja* is over, the *Bheloā phāri* is performed by the *Pāhān* or *Ojhā* for the welfare of the house. (Details of *Bheloā phāri* have been dealt in Chapter VIII). Sometimes the former *pujā* is done by an adult person of the house, but the *Bheloā phāri* is done by the *Pāhān* or *Ojhā*.

After this a feast is given to the invited guests, friends and relatives.

Sometimes more Hinduised Orāons worship *Nārāyan* by appointing a Hindu (Brahman) during the *Grihaprabesh* ceremony (first entry in to a new house).

This type of a rectangular, four-sloped, straw-thatched house is typical of the rural areas of Bengal, and the materials used for the construction i.e. mud, straw etc. are found in abundance in these areas. But almost every year, cyclone, heavy rains and flood cause much damage to the houses which have to be repaired almost every year. During flood sometimes they take shelter on the streets or on the road side in tents supplied by different sources (Tribal Welfare Dept., Block Development Office etc). On account of all these catastrophies they have to spend much for the maintenance of their houses, and this affects their economic life to a great extent, forcing them to subsist on loans or by selling cattle or lands.

A somewhat different picture is seen in the house types of the Orāons of the Ranchi area. There, though the houses are rectangular in the ground plan and the walls are of mud, the roof is conspicuously made of *Khāprā* i.e. country tiles. Straw is not used as roof-material due to its scarcity in that region. The grass thatched roofs as stated by Roy, are very insignificant in number now-a-days. The poles are of *Sāl* trees. Further, there is no plinth or covered *Varandahs* as is the custom in the Sunderban area. As cyclone and flood do not occur here, damage caused to the houses is also much less frequent.

The house types of the Orāons of this region of the Deltaic Bengal are so much like those of the local people that simply by looking at the house one cannot make out whether it belongs to an Orāon. These Orāons built their houses following the Bengal pattern and use the same materials as other local people do.

2. AGRICULTURE:

The Orāons are born agriculturists. From time immemorial the Orāons practise agriculture. In their home and abroad except in the tea plantation and factory areas they follow plough cultivation, and know which soil is suitable for a particular crop. They have acquired all the agricultural methods as are generally applied by settled cultivators.

When the Orāons were brought over to this area of Sunderban, they came as labourers for reclaiming the land covered by the forests of this region and this formed their primary as well as basic economy. With the march of time they began to receive a little portion of their reclaimed land which they utilised for cultivation and thus cultivation at that stage formed a secondary occupation for them. But with the gradual increase of landholdings and the evolution of the land tenures, this secondary means gradually turned into the main source for satisfying their basic wants resulting in the development of a complete agricultural economy.

Now-a-days, the primary occupation of the Orāons of this area is agriculture. Daily labour (both agricultural and non-agricultural) serves as a subsidiary means of livelihood. There are also a few Orāons whose primary occupation is daily labour and they are mainly landless labourers.

The fragmentation of land among the Orāons of this area often takes place, and this creates problems. With the inheritance of property after the death of the owner, the land is divided, and sometimes it happens, even in the life-time of the father or the head of the family, the son or sons or other paternal kins who have right over the family property, insist on the division of property and this ultimately results in the land fragmentation. Besides these mutations, parts of lands are sometimes mortgaged to the money-lenders which also contributes to land-fragmentation in many cases.

As stated earlier, the Orāons of this area classify the different types of land on the basis of fertility and situation thereof. These are:—

1. *Tākāyā* or uppermost land.
2. *Nābāl* or intermediate land.
3. *Dhāpā* or lowest land.

Of these types, the *Dhāpā* is the most fertile and the *Tākāyā* is the least and the *Nābāl* takes the intermediate position. But the difference of the level of these different types of lands are not very prominent. A different type of classification is followed by the Orāons of Ranchi district (due to the practice of terrace cultivation). The Orāons of this latter

district locally classify land on the basis of position and fertility, and group it mainly into two types.

(i) *Tār* or up-lands and (ii) *Don* or low-lands. The *Don* lands are again sub-divided into the following :—

(1) *Tāriā* (2) *Chowā* and (3) *Kudar*. The *Kudar* type of the *Don* land is the most fertile one, and is the lowest land in the valley.

The Orāon landowners generally remain engaged in their own land. But sometimes, the well-to-do Orāons, who have few working hands, employ labourers on daily wage basis for the paddy cultivation in the field. Further, where the landowner has little time to look after his own land or is incapable of employing labourers, he gives his land to the share-cropper (*Bhāg-Chāsi*) who performs all the agricultural operations, the produce being divided into two equal halves between the landowner and the share-cropper.

These people mostly depend on rains for cultivation. However, the rivers and their tributaries and also the irrigation canals help to a great extent in the cultivation.

Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, land is primarily utilised for two main purposes—(i) Homestead and (ii) Cultivation.

For homestead purposes generally the uplands are selected for avoiding flood and rain water and also for easy communication with the surrounding areas.

Cultivable land is mainly utilised in two ways :—

(i) Cultivation for food crops, mainly paddy and also other cash crops like pulses, jute etc.

(ii) Vegetable gardening or kitchen-gardening; growing potato, onion, brinjal, cabbages, mustard, tomato, chillis, tobacco etc.

In this estuarine area with risk of salty water rushing into the fields during high tides and destroying the crops, the most important characteristic feature of cultivation is that this has to be done after building protective embankments which have to be continuously and carefully looked after in order to check the ingress of salt water to lands.

The Orāons of this area mainly cultivate the *Āmar*

paddy though *Āus*, *Boro* or the *Gaiti* types of paddy are also cultivated to a minor extent. The *Āmon* type is generally cultivated in low lands whereas the other types of paddy in uplands or marshy lands.

To cultivate *Āman* paddy, ploughing starts either at the end of February or at the beginning of March and continues till May (i.e. before sowing), the land being ploughed several times. Along with ploughing, levelling and clod-crushing operations are also carried on. Manure is used only in the nursery beds, and not in the fields for cultivation. At first a few seedling beds (nursery beds) are prepared in which, after first few showers of rain in the month of May, seeds are broadcast. In the meantime, with the onset of rain, lands for transplantation are prepared by ploughing and levelling producing a soft thick mud. These lands contain sufficient quantity of water. When the seedlings in the nursery beds are about a foot in height (in the month of July) these are taken in bunches and are transplanted in the field (one seedling more or less 8" inches apart from the other in rows). Weeding by means of *bide*, a comb-like implement, is sometimes done so as to clear away the unwanted plants and to lighten the heavy thickness of the paddy plants which hamper in giving bumper crops. In the months of November and December, even upto January when the paddy assumes golden colour, harvesting starts which brings a new life to the people here. After harvest the paddy stalks are brought home on head, by carrier (*bānk*) or by cart, and heaps are made on the courtyard to dry up the plants in the sun. When dried up the paddy is thrashed out from the straw on wooden planks or on bamboo-split frames. Sometimes cows and bullocks are made to trample on the paddy stalks kept on the ground, moving in a circular way. The paddy is stored in the *golās* or reservoirs made by straw-rope. From the paddy, rice is made by boiling, husking etc.

In these parts of Sunderban where the land suitable for nurseries is not always available, the *Āman* rice is occasionally broadcast on prepared marshy lands. These reclaimed areas of Sunderban generally yield the finest output of *Āman* crop.

The *Āus*, *Boro* or the *Gaiti* rice is of less importance in this area and are cultivated in comparatively high lands. The seed is sown in the month of April or May. When the seedlings are about 6" in height, the land is harrowed by means of *bide*, in order to thin the crop and to clear the weeds. In the month of August or September the harvesting starts. No transplantation is generally done in the cultivation of these varieties of paddy.

For the *Boro* rice, the marshy land which dries up in winter, is prepared in November after which sowing takes place. From March to the middle of April reaping continues.

In the case of the cultivation of the *Āus*, *Boro*, or the *Gaiti* etc., different agricultural operations (such as ploughing, levelling, harrowing, clod-crushing, weeding etc.) are the same as are done in the case of the cultivation of the *Āman* rice.

In connection with the rice-cultivation (mainly the *Āman* variety), a few ceremonial rites are performed by the Orāons.

(i) The first plough is ceremonially given in the field by these people on the first day of *Vaisākh* (April-May). On this day the head of the family after taking bath and wearing clean clothings, worships the family deity with offerings and sometimes also with sacrifice. Then he puts on the plough a mark of sacred vermilion and sprinkles sacred water. Then he starts for the field where he ploughs the field symbolically for three times.

(ii) The head of the family on one auspicious day (before broadcasting of seeds) earmarks a white chicken and offers it to *Dharma*, the Supreme deity and *Buraburi* (ancestors) with due homage, and salutes the Sun and Moon thrice. In the month of December-January i.e. after harvesting this offered fowl is actually sacrificed. This rite is performed for bumper crops.

(iii) The Orāons also have rites and rituals connected with the harvest of the new paddy (*Nawā-khāni*), the details of which have been discussed in the chapter relating to festivals (Chapter VIII).

(iv) After harvest, before taking the new rice, each Orāon

household performs *Bhelo-phari* ceremony (vide Chapter VIII).

Besides the above, a few more magico-religious rites are connected with the agriculture which have been described in the Chapter dealing with magico-religious beliefs and practices (Chapter VIII).

Jute, which has not been given much importance by the Orāons, is cultivated to a limited extent. The season for ploughing, sowing etc. is same as that of the *Āus* paddy. The cutting of the plants starts from the middle of August and lasts upto the middle of October. The stalks are made up in bundle after cutting and kept immersed in water and left to steep for retting. After a few days when the decomposition is sufficient, the fibres are peeled off and are washed in water and then are kept in the sun till they dry up.

In the vegetable gardens (*bāgān*) varieties of vegetables are grown of which tobacco, potato, cabbages, brinjal, tomato, chillis etc. are worth mentioning. Cow-dung is used as a manure. The garden is generally fenced for protecting it from the animals.

Orāons use the following agricultural implements for cultivation :—

1. Plough (*Langal*)
2. Yoke (*Joyāl*)
3. Hoe (*Kodāl* or *Koder*)
4. Leveller (*Mai* or *Bāsoi*)
5. Sickle (*Hānsuā*)
6. Clod-crusher (*Pitnā*)
7. Harrow (*Mai*)
8. Garden-spade (*Nirāni*)
9. Scythe (*Dāoli* or *Dā*)
10. Weeder (*Bide*) etc.

Irrigation is easy due to the presence of a number of water-ways. Abundant rains also help in the natural irrigation.

Males and females, young and old, all take part in the different phases of agricultural operations. Women and young folk generally perform lighter works such as clod crushing, broadcasting, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, winnowing.

husking, etc. but the men, besides the above operations do the heavier works such as ploughing, levelling, harrowing, thrashing, preparing grain-golas etc.

Early in the morning they go to the field with the plough or the leveller on their shoulders and bullocks in front or sickle or clod-crusher in hand and work till noon when they take rest for a while and have their lunch which is either brought to the field generally by the young folk or they rush back home for it. Again they start working and continue till dusk. Sometimes they take a rather heavy breakfast before coming to work in the field, work for the whole day and have their meal in the evening, after returning home.

Orāons who live in the Ranchi area wherefrom these Orāons of the Sunderban area migrated, are also agriculturists. The methods applied for cultivation are also quite similar to this area except for minor variations in the different types of agricultural operations carried out and in the implements used for the same. This is mainly due to the presence of different types of environment, topography and climatic conditions. The cereals cultivated by the Orāons of the Ranchi area are mainly paddy, *māruā*, *gondli*, wheat and different types of pulses (*urid*, *motor* etc.).

Their century long association with the environment and geography of lower Bengal has compelled them to adopt the local methods used in different practices of the material culture. In agriculture, they have adopted the same procedure, and the implements which are used by the local ethnic groups. The plough which is used by them is quite different from that used in the Ranchi area. The Sunderban Orāons use the Bengal type of plough as in the case of all other agricultural communities of this tract. The land is levelled generally by a harrow (*mai*) which is common in Bengal specially in this deltaic region. As in the case in the other cultivating communities of this region, these Orāons also grow paddy and other common cereals. Thrashing is generally done on bamboo-split framework, common in this tract and rarely by trampling by the bullocks as is done in the Ranchi area. The harvested grains are generally stacked in the *go'ās* by the people of this region

including the Orāons which differ from *bāndh* or basket made of straw rope as found in the Ranchi area.

It is, thus, clear that the Orāons have tuned themselves up with the local environment and adopted the methods and practices of the region which in many respects differ from the traditional ways of their original homeland.

3. DOMESTIC ANIMALS AND POULTRY BIRDS :

The domestic animals and poultry birds at present play an important role in the socio-economic and religious life of these people. The outcome from these animals and poultry birds helps them with supplementary income so as to balance their economic burden. Of these animals and poultry birds, cow, bullock, buffalo, goat, sheep, pig, duck, fowl etc. are very important.

The average density of bovine stock in this area is 258 per sq. mile as against the provincial average of 295. The cattle group is of inferior quality due to the salinity of the area, lack of suitable fodder, non-availability of grazing lands and the inferior quality of the breeder.

The prolonged contact in this area with the Hindus has led some of these Orāons to think in terms of the divinity of the cow and to respect it. At present an Orāon of this area does not like to kill a cow or rather he feels guilty if a cow dies in his house though in some cases he employs a cow as draught animal or for thrashing paddy if he lacks a bullock. These people of the Sunderban area give much value to the dairy products. Every day they milk the cow and sell the milk to the agent or in the local market, but on rare occasions they consume the milk or the milk products. Generally the milking of the cow is done either in the morning hours or in the evening.

At Kalinagar in the Sandeshkhali police station, a centre for manufacturing condensed milk and butter from local supplies is in operation by the Khadi Prathistan.

The bullocks are generally employed as draught animals as also pack animals. They harness the bullock with yoke and

plough to till the soil and also to level and to harrow the land. In a few cases the bullocks are employed for thrashing the paddy after harvesting. Those who have carts, employ both bulls and bullocks to draw them. The bulls are also used for breeding purposes. A few houses have buffaloes which are employed mainly as draught animals. The buffaloes are widely believed to be more suitable for draught purpose than the bullocks in the Sunderban climate. These animals mainly depend on grass as their food, but after harvest they are given straw. Sometimes these animals are supplied with kitchen refuse or grains but oil-cakes are rarely given. This negligence is due more to their ignorance in cattle-raising and depressed economic condition than lack of feeling for the animal.

Different sheds are constructed for these animals. Generally these sheds are situated in front of the main hut or just by the side of it. It is a single sloped or double sloped thatched house with mud built walls on three sides. There are some pegs planted in the ground to which the animals remain tied with the rope. The open side is sometimes barricaded with bamboo poles so that the animals can not run away.

The bull-calves are trained as soon as they are thought strong enough to do such work.

Castration is done only in case of the bulls and the he-goats when these are somewhat grown up to make these controllable and more active. During castration the animal is tied by four legs, laid flat on the ground and held by a number of persons so that it cannot move. Then two clean sticks are tied together keeping the testes of the animal between these two sticks and rolled and pressed or hammered so that these are crushed down and become soft. Then they employ worm or luke-worm paste of lime and turmeric or other native medicines.

The goat and sheep are also domesticated by them. These supply them with meat and are also used as sacrificial animal. Though the pig is not used for sacrifice in most of the religious festivities, it is slaughtered during social ceremonies and

used in feast. At present the Hinduised Orāons do not prefer domestic pigs and this is the reason why the number of pigs is so small in this area unlike Ranchi district. The pigsties or sheds for the goat, sheep etc. are also present.

The fowl plays an important role in their socio-economic and religious life. Often these people are seen to sacrifice fowl to please the deities and the evil spirits. They, generally, take the meat of these sacrificed fowl. At social ceremonies such as birth, marriage etc. they cook fowl to make the feast delicious. The fowls are generally sold to the agent or in the local market as also the eggs. The cocks also are made to take part in the cock-fight which gives much recreation to these people. Fowl-sheds are made to give them shelter. Duck is also domesticated by some of these people for meat, egg and for sacrifice. Cat and dog may be seen in many of the houses. Egg is used in the *Bheloā phāri* ceremony. The dog, generally, helps the family by guarding the house.

Domesticated animals are generally looked after by the young folk of the family. Sometimes a few well-to-do families employ a servant (*mahindar*) for this purpose. During non-agricultural seasons, they take these animals out to the nearby fields (after having their breakfast) for grazing and return at about mid-day when they take their meal. After their mid-day meal, they again go to the fields with the animals and return at dusk. Throughout the day (though they play in nearby places) they always keep an eye on the animals so that they may not be lost. During agricultural seasons (ploughing, leveling, weeding and harvesting), the bullocks are employed as draught animals. Fowl, ducks etc. are set free from morning till evening. The bodies of animals are not cleaned regularly, and only during summer months these animals (mostly cattle) are given washing regularly once or twice a week. The sheep, goat etc. are not generally washed or cleaned except in the time of socio-religious ceremonies (particularly during sacrifice). The fowls are never cleaned.

The sheds meant for these animals are cleaned at regular intervals throughout the year. The domesticated animals and the poultry birds are kept in well protected sheds so that jackals,

dogs or any other animal may not harm them. If the domestic animals suffer from disease, the local village specialists are consulted as experienced veterinary doctors are not easily available.

For the welfare of the cattle, the *Goreyā Pujā* or *Goāl Pujā* is performed by almost all the Orāon families in the month of *Kārtick* (October-November) in the cowshed. Those who have buffaloes, worship *Kālī* in the same way. The details of these festivals have been dealt with in the chapter dealing with the magico-religious festivities of the Orāons. (Chapter VIII)

As in the cases of agriculture, fishing etc., in the matter of keeping of domesticated animals, the influence of the local ethnic environment on the Orāons is clearly seen. Domestic animals and poultry birds raised by the Orāons, are the same as kept by the other local Bengalee people with the exception that pigs are also kept by some Orāons though this practice is gradually dying out. The method of keeping, tending and castration is quite similar to those practised by all other castes and communities of this area. The influence of these castes and communities has induced many of these Orāons to give up pig keeping. The local Hindu environment has also influenced them to treat the cow as a sacred animal.

4. FISHING AND HUNTING:

Due to the presence of a number of water-sources (ditches, ponds, canals etc), the Orāons of the Sunderban area practise fishing almost throughout the year. Ditches, canals, ponds etc. are mainly explored by them for catching fishes, but they seldom go to the river for fishing (except in some cases where they use cast-net). Fishing is practised by bare hand as well as by using different types of fishing implements.

Of the various implements, traps (valved as well as non-valved) and nets are worth mentioning. *Dhosna*, *atol*, *polo*, *phur*, *ghuni* etc. are some of the typical traps, and *chākni* (handnet) *kheptā* (castnet), *berā* or *tānā jāl* (seine) etc. are the typical nets which are commonly used by the Orāons of

this area. Besides traps and nets, rods and lines (*chip-barsi*) are also frequently used for catching fishes.

All the basket traps (both valved and non-valved) are generally made of bamboo-splits, tied by means of the bamboo-strip, cotton string or iron wire. The nets are made of cotton-thread. In the hand-net, the net proper is bounded by a circular bamboo-split framework. The rod and line (*chip-barsi*) has a long thin bamboo rod having a long string, made of cotton, the free end of which is tied to a curved pointed hook. Just above the hook, there is a lead weight, and a little above it, is a reed indicator float.

The common method applied by these people for fishing is by means of preparing an artificial barrier in the ditch and bailing out the water of this ditch into another ditch keeping basket traps against all the outlets so that no fish can escape. When all the water of the ditch is baled out, they begin to catch the fishes by bare hand or by implements such as *polo*, or utensil like large plate, basket etc. They also catch fish from canals by throwing cast nets.

Besides the above mentioned common methods of fishing, various fishing implements are also used in the following ways.

(i) Traps—First of all an artificial barrier is prepared in the water source keeping a little gap at the centre or at the side, and in this gap the trap is placed in such a way that the valved entrance remains against the current of water. Along with the current of water, the fishes enter within the trap and cannot get out due to the arrangement of the valves.

(ii) *Polo*—*Polo* is used in the shallow water. The implement is suddenly placed on a spot and by introducing one hand through the narrow open mouth at the top the fishes are caught.

(iii) Handnet—This is generally used in the shallow and clear water. This is kept in slightly immersed position in water and when a shoal of fish happens to pass over the net, the operator suddenly raises the net by both the hands, and thus the fishes are caught.

(iv) Castnet—In this case, the operator holds the net and the string of it by both the hands. Then either by rotating

it round the shoulder or over the head the net is thrown over a suitable place. When the net sinks, the operator slowly pulls the string, and after pulling the net up to the ground, he takes out the fishes which remained entangled in the net or in the pockets of it.

(v) *Chip-barsi* (Rod and line)—First of all a bait (which may be an earth worm or eggs of ants, or flour-paste balls or cooked rice or small fishes etc.) is put into the hook. Then the operator throws the string into the water keeping his eyes on the indicator float. As the fish nibbles at the bait, it is indicated by the reed-stick i.e. indicator. Then the operator pulls the rod with a sudden jerk and the hook gets entangled in the throat of the fish. Sometimes a quantity of the bait (*Chār*) is thrown into the water where fishing by means of rod and line will be done in order to attract the fishes. Though the Orāons practise fishing, it cannot be termed as forming a major subsistence activity of these people. It only acts as a subsidiary means of earning for them. The fishes which they catch, are, generally, sold in the local markets and only occasionally, are consumed by them.

To the general people of Sunderban, estuaries provide an extensive natural fishery, calling only for harvesting without any expense of effort on breeding, rearing or stocking. But the season for fishing is restricted. Only from November to February the fishing is generally done. With the approach of March, fishing is generally abandoned, particularly in the lower region due to the non-navigable character of the waterways for the fishing crafts. Fishing is permitted free of charge. Sometimes there is a tendency to establish fish farming.

During fishing, both males and females, irrespective of age are engaged. The bare-hand fishing and fishing with traps are practised by all, but fishing with cast net and seine are generally done by the adult male folk. Hand-net is generally used by the women and the young children whereas rod and line by both the male and the female folk, irrespective of age. There is no fixed time of the day for fishing though it is generally not done in the evening or at night.

After fishing, fishes are kept in a container made of bamboo splits or in an earthen pitcher which acts as a container.

The following are a few examples of the large varieties of fishes caught by them:—

Bele—*Glossogobius Givris*

Bhāngan Bātā—*Labeo bata*

Bhetki—*Lates calcarifer*

Boāl—*Wallagonia attu*

Chāndā—*Ambassis nama*

—*S. Sineuisis*

Chital—*Notopterus Chitala*

Chuno Khalsa—*Trichogaster chuna*

Dento or Tit Puti—*B. Ticto*

Gule—*Mystus gulio*

Gurjāoli—*P. Tetraductylus*

Kātlā—*Catla catla*

Kānchan Puti—*B. Conchonius*

Kharke Bātā—*C. Reba*

Khalse—*Colisa fasciata*

Koi—*Anabas testudineus*

Lātā—*O. Punctatus*

Māgur—*Clarias batrachus*

Mouralā—*Amblypharyngodon mola*

Mrigal—*Cirrhitina mrigala*

Pārese—*Mugil parsia*

Punti—*Barbus Stigma*

Rui—*Labio rohita*

Sal—*O. Marulius*

Saral or S. Puti—*Barbus sarrana*

Singi—*Heteropneustes fossilis*

Sole—*O. Striatus*

Tangrā—*Mystus tengra*, etc. etc.

Besides the above mentioned fishes, they also catch crabs, *Gugli* (shell-fish) and *Chingri* (Prawn) of different varieties.

The common Sunderban fishes are generally *Bhetki*, *Hilsa*, *Tapsi*, *Bhangan*, *Kanmagur*, *Rekha*, *Rucha*, *Chitra*, *Parse*, *Tengra*, *Bunspata*, *Datnia*, *Pangas* and *Bagda chingri*. Crabs and shrimps are common, and sharks and porpoises are

plenty in the rivers. *Kai* and *Māgur* are common in the *bils* or bogs.

In the Ranchi area due to the scarcity of ponds, rivers, ditches etc. fishing is practised by the Orāons to a very limited extent. A number of fishes which are found in the Sunderban area are absent there. Fishing by bare-hand, traps, and by nets are practised but the *berājāl* (seine) is, generally, not in use as also the *shānglā*, which is used in the Sunderban area for catching *Hilsa* fish.

Hunting is almost absent now-a-days among the Orāons of the Sunderban area due to the lack of forests near-by. A few families have one or two hunting implements such as spear (*ballam*), bamboo pole (*lathi*), sword (*talwar*), bow and arrow (*Tir-dhanuk*) and a few traps (*Jal*) for catching birds etc. But now-a-days these are only used for killing small games such as birds, hares etc. No festival is associated with hunting or fishing.

But, if we examine the case of the Orāons of Ranchi district we get an opposite picture. In the Ranchi area, hunting is one of the most important factors in their socio-economic and religious life. They had at least three important festivals annually in which all the able Orāon males used to participate. These were *Phāgu Sendrā* (Spring hunt), *Bishu Sendrā* (Summer hunt) and *Jaith Sendrā* (Hunting in the month of *Jaishta*) though at present these are gradually losing pomp and grandeur day by day due to deforestation, reservation of forests, industrialisation etc., still hunting plays a more dominant role in their life and activities than that of the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

Further, these occasional huntings (which are practised irregularly) in the Sunderban area are never collective in nature but are individualistic in pattern. The young and adult males generally take part in this activity.

Methods of fishing as practised by the Orāons of the Sunderban area, hardly differ in any way from those of the local inhabitants but their practice of casual hunting, a vestige of their past tradition, is usually not seen among the local Bengalee castes and communities, except a few low castes.

5. GATHERING

Gathering now-a-days plays an insignificant role in the life of the Orāons of the Sunderban area. When this area was full of dense forests in the past, they used to collect dry wood and leaves, roots and tubers, fruits and flowers, different types of vegetables etc. for their daily use. But as the forest gradually disappeared, their dependence on it also began to dwindle day by day; and now-a-days it is only restricted to a very limited extent, in the collection of dry leaves and wood, and also in a few cases in the collection of fruits and tubers. Other objects of less importance in gathering are cow-dung (for fuel) and grass for domestic animals and also a kind of grass and leaves for thatching purpose. Generally the young children and the women folk participate in this activity to a very great extent and they collect these materials from the nearby places. There is no fixed place or fixed time or season for gathering. Generally it is practised throughout the whole year and mostly during the day time. But during the agricultural season (sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting etc.) as most of the people remain engaged in these activities, the frequency of gathering decreases to a considerable extent.

Edible objects (the roots and tubers etc.) are gathered by digging with a pointed stick or iron rod but the dry branches of the trees are collected by breaking by the hand or with the *āksi* or cutting with the scythe. Cow-dung is collected by bare hands and kept in a basket.

For the collection of these objects, different types of implements are used, of which '*Jhuri*' i.e. basket and scythe are the most important. Besides these, *āksi*, a bamboo stick with a hooked bending is also in use.

No religious or any sort of rite is associated with gathering.

Gathering is also practised by the Orāons of the Ranchi area, but it, also, doesnot play a significant role in their life now-a-days. Generally dry wood and leaves (mainly of the *Sāl*), some roots and tubers are gathered there.

Gathering as practised by the Sunderban Orāons is not

peculiar to these people only, but is taken recourse to by all poor people of the region of all communities.

6. DOMESTIC UTENSILS AND HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE

Domestic utensils which are used by the Orāons of this area, are also similar to those used by the people of the neighbouring castes and communities. These utensils are either of earth or of metal, of which brass is most important and are used for various purposes. In a typical Orāon household of the Sunderban area the following few utensils are often found.

(a) *For Cooking Purpose :—*

1. *Hāriā* or *Hāndi* (pot)—cooking rice
2. *Karāi* (cauldron)—cooking vegetables, pulses, fish etc.
3. *Chātu* (frying pan)—frying, preparing bread etc.
4. *Dābthum* (large spoon)—Stirrer.
5. *Khunṭi* (laddle)—Stirrer.
6. *Kāntā*—stirring pulse-gruel
7. *Sarā* (cover)—covering the mouth of the pot

(b) *For Keeping Cooked Food :—*

1. *Thāriā* (large plate).
2. *Bāṭi* (cup).

(c) *For Cutting Purpose :—*

1. *Banthi* (cutter).
2. *Chhuri* (knife).
3. *Dā* or *Daoli* (curved chopper).

(d) *For Eating and Drinking Purpose :—*

1. *Thāriā* (large plate) eating purpose.
2. *Bāṭi* (cup)—eating purpose.
3. *Gilas* (glass)—drinking purpose.

(e) *For Storing Water :—*

1. *Bālli* (tub)
2. *Hāriā* or *Hāndi* (pitcher)

Besides the above utensils, a typical Orāon household of Sunderban also keeps a number of furniture. These furniture are made of different materials and are purchased from the local markets or from the nearby urban centres. The

following list will give an idea about the furniture of an Orāon household:—

(a) *Bedding* :—

1. *Pātiā* (mat).
2. *Lugā* (chaddar or body cover).
3. *Kānthā* (stitched up wrapper)
4. *Chāddar* (bed cover).
5. *Kambal* (rug).
6. *Bālis* (pillow).
7. *Khāt* (bed-stead).

(b) *For Keeping Clothings* :—

1. *Bāxo* (box).
2. *Putli* (clothings packed by a piece of cloth).
3. Racks.

(c) *For Lighthing Purpose* :—

1. *Lāllen* (lantern)-
2. *Kupi* (burner light)
3. Torch

(d) *For Latrine Purpose* :—

1. *Badnā* (ablusion water pot).
2. *Mag* (mug).

(e) *For Protection from Rain and Sun* :—

1. *Chātā* (umbrella).
2. *Tokā* (local variety of umbrella made with leaves and bambo-strip frame).

(f) *Religious Paraphernalia* :—

1. *Ghantā* (bell).
2. *Kānasi* (bell metalgong).
3. *Sankha* (conch-shell).
4. *Pradeep* (lamp).
5. *Dhunachi* (incense burner).

Utensils used for cooking purpose, for keeping cooked food and those used for eating and drinking purposes, are mainly made of brass (glass, cup, plate, spoon etc.), a few are of iron (cauldron, pan, flat spoon etc.), and some are earthen (pot or pitcher, cover etc.). Implements used for cutting purposes are all made of iron with wooden handles. Of the

water-storing utensils, '*bālti*', is made of galvanised iron sheets but *hāriā* is earthen ware.

At present, besides these materials, glass, aluminium and enamelled utensils are also used by these people.

Regarding furniture, it may be said, that the materials used for these are numerous and varies from date palm leaf to metal.

The number and items of these utensils and furniture vary as per family size and economic condition of the people.

The domestic utensils and furniture which are common in an Orāon household, are also common in the houses of local Hindus and Muslims in general of the Deltaic Bengal. As in the case of other local people, the Orāons on occasions, use plantain leaves as plates for dining but their brethren in Ranchi use *Sal* leaves for the purpose.

7. DRESS, ORNAMENTS AND TATOOING :

In the Sunderban area, the dress proper of the Orāons and the pattern of wearing the same are similar to those of the people of the neighbouring castes and communities, which can definitely be distinguished from their kindred in the Chotā-Nāgpur plateau. Here the males wear *dhuti*, *shirt*, *genji*, *pajama* and in a few cases trousers also. None of the males puts on *lenguti* (gee-string) which is a common garment of the Orāons of the Ranchi area. The females wear *sari*, blouse, petticoat etc. The children use shirt, *panī*, *dhuti*, *genji*, frock etc.

The Orāon males in this area, do not wear ornaments but this is usual for the Orāons in the Ranchi area. The females wear bangle (*churi*), necklace (*hār*), earring (*dul*), nose-flower, finger-ring etc. made of silver or brass. In a few cases, small ornaments of gold are worn. A number of them also nowadays puts on gilt, glass and plastic ornaments. But the traditional ornaments of the Ranchi area are made of silver i.e. *matīā*, *khāmbiā*, *chādoā*, *balas*, *rasniā*, *hānsuli*, *jhutiā*, *khongso*, *berā* etc, and *sholā* and palm leaf ear plugs (*bindo*) and also

the bamboo combs (*bāgirkā*) are lacking among the Orāons of this area.

The Orāons of this area use dress and ornaments like other local people. The method of wearing *sāri* and *dhuṭi* is also similar.

The regional influence has exerted itself on the dress and ornaments of these Orāons.

Among the Orāons of this area, tatoo marks are found among a few elderly women and never among the male populace. But in the Ranchi area, tatooing is practised by the Orāons of both the sexes. The tatoo marks are generally present on the arms, legs and the breast, but sometimes on the forehead also.

The common belief regarding tatooing among the Orāons of the Ranchi area, is that, the husband and wife would recognise each other or a dead would be recognised by his ancestors in the other world by identifying this tatoo mark. This belief is totally absent among the Orāons of this area. Among the members of other communities of this area, tatooing is not very significant.

8. CLEANLINESS OF HOUSE, DRESS AND PERSON :

The Orāons of this area occasionally clean their houses by sweeping and also by plastering the floor and walls of the houses and the courtyard by using a mixture of cowdung, earth and water. It is specially done during religious festivals or social ceremonies. To purify the house and to get rid of the evil spirits, they plaster it with cowdung, earth and water and also sprinkle sacred water, *Tulsijal* (water in which Basil leaves are dropped and kept within a brass vessel) as also when any pollution period (of birth, disease or of death) is over. They clean their household utensils, furniture and sheds of their domestic animals and birds at regular intervals.

They also wash their clothings off and on in nearby ponds or canals. Both men and women, young and old have fascination for wearing clean clothings, which is not so clearly seen among the Orāons of the Ranchi area. Sometimes the Orāons

of the Sunderban area use soap both for washing clothings and for cleaning their bodies.

During the summer and the rains, the Orāons of all ages and both sexes, take bath in the river, pond or in the canal regularly. In the hot season, they wash their cattle at regular intervals. During winter, they do not bathe regularly. After bath, they wear their dress and comb their hair. The women folk have a great fascination for combing their hair neatly and making coiffure. During socio-religious festivities, the cleanliness of dress and of person is remarkably seen.

The degree of cleanliness and sanitary habits found among the Sunderban Orāons, is not inferior to what is present among other people of the locality of the same economic level.

9 MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS:

Unlike their brethren in Ranchi district, the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal have fewer musical instruments and these are played in some socio-religious festivities. Musical instruments used by the Orāons of this area are mostly of modern type and not like original Orāon musical instruments of the Chotā-Nāgpur area. The musical instruments are only a few and are found in a few houses only.

It is the absence of their traditional bachehlors' dormitory in the Deltaic Bengal area that has led to the deterioration in their traditional musical trend, so prominent in the life of an Orāon in the Ranchi area. Musical instruments are played only occasionally, mainly during the marriage ceremony and religious festivities.

Of the musical instruments, *bānsi* (bamboo-flute), harmonium, *dhol* (drum), *khol-kartāl*, *ghantā* (bell), *kānsi*, konch-shell, *sānāi* etc. are worth mentioning. But in playing on these instruments, cadence is not always maintained. This is largely due to adoption of tunes from the neighbours which are foreign to their nature.

At present, a few well-to-do Orāons possess musical instru-

ments like gramophone and radio which create much enthusiasm among the people.

In the Ranchi area, though the traditional pomp and grandeur have been considerably reduced, the evenings of a large number of Orāon villages still murmur with the sweet melody of music played in the *ākhrās* (dancing ground) where a number of instruments like *māṇḍal* (kheḷ), *dhāk*, *nagera* (damna), *runj*, flute, *dhōl* etc. are played along with dance and vocal music.

It is these gathering places that serve as training ground for the use of the musical instruments with vocal music and dancing for the youngsters.

10. FIRE AND FUEL:

Fire is considered as sacred by the Orāons of the Sunderban area. It is not only essential in their day to day activities, but is also treated as sacred in different socio-religious functions; (from birth to death it is almost indispensable in almost all the rites). Sometimes the village magicians employ fire to trace out the evil spirits, responsible for different evil deeds and also for driving away the same from the locality or from the body of the 'haunted' person.

The dried up twigs or branches of trees and dried leaves and the dried jute sticks plastered with cowdung are the most common types of fuel used by these people in this area. Sometimes dry grass, straw, jute wastes etc. are also used as fuel. Most of these are collected from nearby places. Coal as a fuel is too costly for them and is hardly used by them.

Sometimes fire is preserved by them for future use in a straw rope (*bolān*) or in an oven or in a pot full of rice-husk, thereby eliminating the cost of match sticks.

The oven prepared by these Orāons, is quite simple and similar to that used by the neighbouring caste people. It is made up of earth and plastered with a paste of mud, cowdung and water. It is triangular in shape, with three corners slightly raised in the shape of cones, known as *Kānā* or *Jhick*. These

three cones serve as the supporting stands on which the pot or the pan is placed. A small pit is first dug out and on three sides of the pit, three cones are made with earth. Inside the pit, the fuel burns and the ashes are stored.

The use of fire and fuel in Southern Bengal is generally similar to that of the Orāons of the Ranchi area excepting that dried *Sal* leaves are extensively used as fuel as these are freely available in the Ranchi area. On the other hand, the jute stick plastered with cowdung forms a popular item of fuel among the Sunderban Orāons, but is rarely used by the Ranchi Orāons.

The oven prepared by the Orāons of the Ranchi area, is also slightly different in shape and size from the Orāon ovens of the Sunderban area. The Orāon oven of the Ranchi area is bigger in size and rather rectangular in shape. First of all a big earthen platform is made and a small gap is kept in one of the lateral sides where the oven is made. Within the gap, a small depression is scooped out where the fuel burns. The raised cones of the Orāon oven of Ranchi are less prominent and almost faint as compared to those of the Sunderban. The remaining portion of the platform serves for keeping the cooking vessels

11 FOODS, DRINKS AND NARCOTICS:

The staple food of the Orāons of the Southern Bengal is *bhāt* (cooked rice). It is generally taken along with *dāl* (cooked pulses) or vegetables or both. Generally two principal meals are taken by them, one at midday and the other at night and in addition they often take a break-fast in the morning (*Pāntā belā*), consisting of the *Pāntā-bhāt*, i.e. rice cooked overnight and kept soaked in water. At times instead of the *Pāntā-bhāt* freshly cooked rice is also taken at break-fast.

Along with the *Pāntā-bhāt* no other additional dishes are taken. In most of the cases, a chilli or an onion with a little salt, serves the purpose. The midday meal is taken at noon (*duphrā*), when cooked rice is taken along with other dishes

such as *dāl* (cooked pulses) or vegetables or fish or meat etc. The other principal meal is taken in the evening (*sānjh*) or at night (*rāt*) which is practically similar to the midday meal. As *bhāt*, both *āruā* and *usnā* types of rice are taken, but the latter is generally used.

The rice which is parboiled before husking is called *usnā* rice and the rice which before husking, is only sun-dried instead of being boiled, is called *āruā* rice (*ātap* rice). Of the pulses, *musuri*, *mug*, *maṭar*, *māskalāi*, *cholā*, *khesāri* etc. are generally used.

They also take as tiffin or substitute for a main meal, some preparations of rice, such as *chidā* (chapped rice) or *muri* (fried rice) etc. Sometimes the young ones are given rice-gruel to eat.

Occasionally rice is cooked with *dāl* (pulses) and spices, onion etc. which is known as *Khichuri*. It is a delicious dish for them, but cannot be prepared frequently on account of higher cost.

During socio-religious festivals, *Pithā* (rice-cake) and *Taharī* (rice boiled with meat—for details vide Chapter—VIII—*Āsriā puṣā*) are also taken by these people.

For vegetables, they generally depend on their kitchen garden or on the local *hāt* (market). A number of vegetables, such as *begun* (brinjal), *kaḥi* (cabages), *lāu* (pumpkin), *kumrā* (courd), varieties of *sāk*, *lankā* (chilli), *ṭeyāj* (onion), *ālu* (potato), *biliti begun* (tomato) etc. are grown in the kitchen garden.

Besides these, a number of other vegetables can also be procured from neighbouring areas or from the local market.

Further, a number of roots and tubers are also eaten by these poor people of the Sunderban area. Of these roots and tubers, the important ones are tubers like *mulā* (radish), *kacū* (arum), *ol* (arum) etc.

Regarding fish and meat, it may be said that neither fish nor meat constitutes a regular item in the daily menu of the Orāons. Whenever available, they sell these for cash money, and only occasionally use the same themselves.

During socio-religious festivities, or when guests or rela-

tives come, *bhāt* is supplied with additional delicacies, like curry of fish or of meat along with *dāl* or vegetables.

The fishes which are consumed by these people are mostly of small varieties such as *kai*, *māgur*, *puti*, *tengrā*, *lātā*, *chang*, *bele*, *mouralā*, *sol*, etc. They take flesh of fowl, duck, pigeon, goat, sheep, pig etc. Only on rare occasions, they get chance of eating flesh of birds or animals hunted by them. The Orāons of the Sunderban area do not take beef, and a majority of them, now-a-days, has given up eating pigs due to the Hindu influence of the locality.

Eggs of their domestic poultry birds are generally sold for cash money, and only on rare occasions are consumed by them. Egg is essential for celebrating their *Bheloā phāri* ceremony.

These Orāons have still retained their taboo against eating or doing any harm to the animal or bird or the plant representing their totemic sib.

In the Ranchi area, the Orāons are accustomed to eat rice. Besides rice, *māruā* and *gondli* (*millet*) also, are cultivated and taken by them but in the Sunderban area the Orāons cultivate only rice. Varieties of vegetables are also taken by them, and fish and meat occasionally.

Of the drinks, *hāndiā* (rice-beer) is the most important one, and is essential for a number of socio-religious activities. It is a kind of drink prepared by fermenting rice into a brew, which is both beverage as well as food. It is prepared in the following way :—

A quantity of rice is boiled in a jar, and when the water has nearly dried up, the jar is taken out of the hearth, and the boiled rice is spread on a mat to cool down. Thereafter, a few fermenting balls (*bitchi* or *rānu*) are mixed up with the rice.

The empty jar is thoroughly cleaned and dried over the hearth, and then the rice mixed with the fermenting material, is put into the jar which along with its contents, is kept away in a cool place for about three days. Afterwards sufficient quantity of water is mixed with it, and the contents are stir-

red. The liquid strained off from this, is *hāndiā* ready for drinking.

Hāndiā has permeated deeply into the socio-religious life of these people. It has become too intimate with their culture. They spend a lot of their income to have *hāndiā*. Besides all social ceremonies and religious festivals, in their day-to-day life, they take *hāndiā*. The female folk and the children are less addicted to this than the adult and old male folk.

Besides *hāndiā*, milk and tea are also considered as drinks and occasionally taken.

Tobacco and *biri* are the main narcotics. Often aged Orāon males are noticed to smoke tobacco in a hubble-bubble. In general, the Orāon males (young and old) and a few elderly females smoke *biri* (country-made cigarette); *Pān* (betel-leaf) is also chewed by them along with lime, betel nut and such other things. A few also chew betel-nut. At present, the enlightened young Orāons smoke cigarettes, and besides *hāndiā* (rice-beer), country liquor is also taken from the grogshop. A few persons are addicted to hemp-smoking.

In the Ranchi area also, all these drinks and narcotics are taken by the Orāons. But besides rice-beer, *hāndiā* is also prepared with *māruā* or mixed rice and *māruā*. *Mahuā*-liquor is also a popular drink there.

The mode of preparation of *hāndiā* from rice, *māruā* or from both in the Ranchi area, is almost the same as is done in this area (with rice only), though some local variations may be noticed.

The food-pattern of Sunderban Orāons is practically the same as that of the poor people of the region of all communities. As regards drinking habit, this also is seen amongst the many other neighbouring backward communities.

12. DAILY LIFE

The Orāon males have to work hard for major part of the day in the agricultural field or as labourers for earning a bare livelihood. The Orāon females too remain fully engaged with

their household activities and also sometimes by helping the father, the husband or the son in the field.

The Orāon usually divides the day (24 hours) into the following eight parts.

A Day (24 hours)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Sakāl (Dawn)	Pāntā belā	Kumār Duphrā	Duphrā (Noon)	Hātbelā (Late noon)	Baikāl (After- noon)	Sānjh (Even- ing)	Rāt (Night)
4 to 6 a.m.	(Early morning)	(Late Morning)	12 noon to 3 p.m.	3 to 5 p.m.	5 to 6 p.m.	6 to 8 p.m.	8 p.m. onward
	6 to 9 a.m.	9 to 12 noon					

From dawn to dusk, these people remain busy with different types of work in the struggle for existence. Even the old and the young are seen doing different types of jobs in different seasons. The activities of an Orāon vary in different seasons which may be grouped into three categories viz. agricultural season, non-agricultural season and during socio-religious festive occasions.

Jaisthā (May-June) to *Augrāhayan* (November-December) may be termed as the agricultural season while the non-agricultural season mainly starts from *Pous* (December-January) to *Baisākh* (April-May). The socio-religious festivals generally take place throughout the year. The daily life and activities of the Orāons of this area in these different seasons, have been described below in order to give, in nutshell, an idea about the pattern of their activities in general.

(A) ACTIVITIES DURING AGRICULTURAL SEASON:

***Sakāl* (Dawn)**

Both males and females (excepting very young children and very old persons) get up from bed and wash their face and mouth. The female folk start their day with different types of household work, such as sweeping, cleaning, washing, bringing water etc. and also preparing food. The male members also at the same time do some household works, such as repairing of house or of plinth or of fencing of the garden or work in the

kitchen-garden etc. Grown up children help their mother in her household work or take care of their younger brothers and sisters. The old persons (who are unable to do heavy work) either weave mat with date-palm leaves or make fuel with cow-dung and jute-sticks and so on.

Pāntābe'ā (Early morning) to *Baikāl* (afternoon).

The male members generally take their breakfast in the early part of the *Pāntābelā* and start for the field, with plough and yoke on shoulders and a couple of bullocks in front during the ploughing season. The young boys of about twelve and above also follow their elders to the field. Some of them do not take food at home but carry it to the field along with them in a *thāriā* (plate). Sometimes young boys or girls also take food for their elders to the field at noon. During ploughing season, the females generally remain at home and do different types of household work such as bringing water, collecting fuel, preparing night meal, cleaning the house (with a solution of cow-dung, earth and water) and also work in the kitchen garden, prepare *māliā* (mat) and so on. The young girls look after their little brothers and sisters, play with them and also help the adult female members in their work. In '*Baikāl*' i.e. afternoon, the males come back from the field, the young females give them water to wash their face and feet, after which they take rest or chat for sometime. The younger ones put the bullocks and also other animals and poultry birds in their respective sheds. During weeding, transplanting and harvesting seasons, almost all the members of both sexes go to the field for work. Only very old persons or at least an elderly woman remain at home and look after the house and also after the little ones. Where there are no old persons, generally the young girls stay at home, look after the house and also after the younger ones. Sometimes, when there is no one to look after the little ones at home the female folk take along with them the little ones and keep them in a safe place near the field, so that, they can keep an easy watch over their children. The young children also help their parents and other members of the family in the field. Some

of them also tend the cattle in the grazing grounds. During this period the adult females generally go to the field a few hours later than the males (after finishing their house-hold work). During off-days between different agricultural operations, the males generally engage themselves in different types of subsidiary works, such as daily labour, selling of commodities, fishing etc. On market days, both the males and the females go to the market to sell different articles and/or to buy the necessary goods. They also catch fish and go to different places for various types of works.

Sānjh (Evening):

At dusk the Orāons start taking their night meal, whereafter they gossip with their neighbours and relatives, and take *hāndiā* from time to time while gossiping. Some go to visit others' houses to discuss about different socio-economic matters.

Rāt (Night):

The night is meant for their relaxation when they take rest and sleep to gather energy for the next day. At night husband and wife talk on different socio-economic affairs, familial affairs and so on; and so do the father and aged son. Mother and daughter talk on house-hold affairs. At the darkness of night the married couples fulfil their carnal appetite.

(B) ACTIVITIES DURING NON-AGRICULTURAL SEASON:

After the agricultural season is over i.e., after harvesting in the month of *Pous* (November-December) till the beginning of ploughing in the month of *Jaistha* (May-June), the activities of the female Orāons, the young children and the old and infirm persons remain the same, only that they have no work in the paddy-field as the agricultural season is over. The adult female folk remain busy with their house-hold work (e.g. preparation of food, cleaning, sweeping, bringing of water and fuel, nursing of children etc.) and are helped by young females. The young children take care of their younger brothers and sisters and play with them. The young male

folk go to tend the cattle in the nearby field and also keep the animals and fowls in their respective sheds in the evening. Either these young people or their adult female relatives give food to these animals and fowls. The old persons weave mat, clean cereals, look after the little children and also gossip in between these works. But the active Orāon males generally go about for jobs for balancing their deficit budget, and thereby trying to save their families from starvation. Those who are employed as daily labourers in different private and public enterprises (such as in brickfield, road repairing, dam preparing etc.), get up early in the morning, and after washing their face and mouth take breakfast of watered rice cooked overnight, and then start for their respective jobs. They return home in the evening. Sometimes they carry with them some food and eat it during the midday interval. If the place of work is far away from their respective houses, they erect temporary sheds near their place of work and live there for the period of the work.

But here, it may be noted, that any sort of seasonal or permanent migration of these tribal people from this district is almost nil and it does not form a regular occupational pattern here as is the case in some other districts of West Bengal and also in the Ranchi area.

Those Orāons who do not get employment as daily-labourer, or do not require it, generally remain busy in repairing their houses and boundary walls, attending to the *āil* (raised boundary of the field) etc. They also fish in the nearby water sources, and cultivate different vegetables in the kitchen garden. In these activities, they get help from their adult female folk and young children.

In this season also, they go to the *hāt* (local market) regularly for selling their produces and/or for purchasing their requirements. Generally they reach the *hāt* (local market) in the *hātbelā*.

In the evening they drink *hāndiā* (rice-beer) and gossip with their neighbours and relatives. At night they sleep in order to shake off their day long fatigue and weariness. Only

the married couple who are not very old, pass a fraction of night by satisfying their sexual desire.

(C) ACTIVITIES DURING SOCIO-RELIGIOUS FESTIVE OCCASIONS:—

A social ceremony, such as birth or marriage etc. or a religious festivity brings new life and enthusiasm in them. In addition to their normal activities, they have to perform on these occasions some additional duties. On a puja day in the family, the woman folk clean and sweep the house in the morning, particularly the place for worship.

Both males and females participate in this activity to a varied extent. Generally the senior-most male member of the family takes bath early in the morning and wears clean clothes and also observes fast for performing the puja and carries out the usual rites and rituals for the particular puja at the appropriate hour.

In a social function also, both males and females young and old, remain busy with a good number of things. When a child is born the women assist the midwife in the delivery; in burying the placenta, in washing and nursing the mother and the new born child, so also when a death takes place male folk prepare the bier, carry the dead body, dig grave, or prepare pyre etc.

Socio-religious functions have been discussed in detail in subsequent chapters which will give a clear-cut idea about the activities of these people during these occasions.

Besides these activities, sometimes male folk of different ages (except the very young and old ones) take part in sports and games, which generally take place during day time. Further the young children are often seen to play on the streets or in the court-yard. The female folk generally do not take part in sports and games except on particular occasions.

Besides these normal activities of the daily life of the Orāons of the Sunderban area, some diversities may be noticed on occasions of natural calamities, such as cyclones, floods etc.,

when their normal activities may be wholly upset for fighting the calamity.

The activities of the Sunderban Orāons in different seasons discussed above, belong practically to the same pattern as is seen among other poor agricultural communities of the locality.

13. DIVISION OF LABOUR

On account of their poor economy, these people irrespective of age and sex, remain busy throughout the year in different economic pursuits. The participation of males and females has been discussed below in order to give a societal profile regarding the division of work among men, women and children using the following symbols for convenience.

M — by adult males exclusively.

Mf — women participate to a limited extent with men.

F — by adult females exclusively.

Fm — men participate to a limited extent with females.

B — by both sexes on same task.

Bd — by both sexes on different task.

C — mainly by pre-pubertal children.

Cb — boys only.

Cg — girls only.

Agriculture: Ploughing (M), Levelling (M), Clod crushing (Mf), Manuring (M), Harrowing (M), Sowing (B), Transplanting (FmC), Weeding (BC), Irrigation (M), Harvesting (BC), Thrashing (Mf), Winnowing (BC), Preparation of grain-gola (M), Husking (F), Preparation of rice (F).

Kitchen Garden: Ploughing (M), Levelling (M), Harrowing (M), Manuring (M), Sowing (B), Planting (BC), Watering and Irrigation (BC), Application of insecticides (BC), Weeding (BC), Reaping (BC).

Animal Husbandry and Poultry: Tending cattle and other animals like sheep, goat etc. (C), Care of other animals like pig, dog etc. (BC), Care of poultry birds (BC), Giving food to the animals and poultry birds (BC), Cleaning of cattle

(MF), Milking (MF), Cleaning of animal and poultry sheds (Fm).

Domestic work: Preparation of food (FmCg), Preparation of drinks (Mf), Preparation of narcotics (Mf), Cutting of vegetable and pasting of spices (FCg), Sweeping the house (FCg), Cleaning the house with cowdung, water and earth (FCg), Cleaning of domestic utensils and furniture (FmC), Washing of clothings (BC), Nursing little children (BCg), Fetching drinking water (FmCg), Husking of paddy (FCg), Grinding of grains (F), Making bed (BC), Preparation and preservation of pickles and food-stuff (FCg), Preservation of seeds (Mf), Killing of pig, goat, fowl etc. for socio-religious or other feasts (MCf), Marketing and selling of commodities (BC), Erection or repairing of house, animal and poultry sheds, *āl* boundary wall, fencing etc. (MCb), Preparation of mat with date-palm leaves, broom etc. (FCg).

Fishing and Hunting: Preparation of net (M), Preparation of traps (M), Fishing by hand net (FC), Fishing by rod and line (MC), Fishing by cast-net (MCb), Fishing by bailing out of water, Fishing by barehand or with non-valved traps (BC), Fishing with valved-trap (BC), Fishing with spear and harpoon (MfCb).

Hunting of little games with bow and arrow (MCb), Trapping of birds (Cb).

Gathering: Gathering of fuel (FmC), Collection of edible objects (FmC).

Labour: Labourer in brick field, in preparation of dam etc. (M), in house-building work (Mf), in agricultural field (BC), in grocer's shop (MCb), domestic servant (MCb), in office (M).

The type of division of labour between males and females etc. as discussed above is practically similar to what is found among other poor people of the backward classes of the region.

14. ROUTINE OF ENGAGEMENTS MONTH BY MONTH

Name of the month	Corresponding English Calendar	Economic activities	Festivals
<i>Baisākh</i>	April-May	Preparation of field by ploughing, levelling and harrowing; but mainly as day labourer, fishing, selling of commodities, kitchen gardening.	
<i>Jais̥tha</i>	May-June	Ploughing, levelling and harrowing the field.	
<i>Āshār</i>	June-July	Sowing, ploughing, levelling, repairing of <i>āl</i> , fishing, selling of commodities, day-labourer.	1. <i>Gāon-deotī puṛjā</i> (H) 2. <i>Grām puṛjā</i> or <i>Grām-bāndhā-Phase-II</i> (V)
<i>Sṛāvan</i>	July-August	Weeding, transplanting, fishing, cutting and retting of jute.	
<i>Vādro</i>	August-September	Transplanting, fishing, selling of commodities, job work, cutting and retting of jute.	1. <i>Nawā-khāni</i> (H) 2. <i>Manasā puṛjā</i> (H)
<i>Āswīn</i>	September-October	Fishing, daily labour, selling of commodities etc.	1. <i>Karam puṛjā</i> (H) 2. <i>Lakshmi puṛjā</i> (H)

<i>Kārtick</i>	October-November	Fishing, daily labour, selling of commodities etc.	1. <i>Kāli puṇā</i> (H) 2. <i>Goreyā puṇā</i> (H) 3. <i>Sohārāi puṇā</i> (H) 1. <i>Grām puṇā</i> or <i>Grām-bāndhā-Phase II</i> (V) 1. <i>Tusu</i> (V)
<i>Augrāhayān</i>	November-December	Harvesting	
<i>Pous</i>	December-January	Harvesting, thrashing, preparation of grain-gola, job work etc.	
<i>Māgh</i>	January-February	Thrashing, preparation of grain gola, repairing of house, job work etc.	1. <i>Kāli puṇā</i> (V) 2. <i>Saraswati puṇā</i> (H) 3. <i>Nārāyan puṇā</i> (H)
<i>Phālgun</i>	February-March	Daily labour, fishing, selling of commodities, gardening, repairing of house etc.	1. <i>Sitalā puṇā</i> (H) 2. <i>Surjāhi puṇā</i> (H)
<i>Chaitra</i>	March-April	Daily labour, fishing, selling of commodities, gardening etc.	1. <i>Sārhal</i> (H).

V = Village Festival; H = House-hold Festival.

CHAPTER III

THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

The Orāons have been known as a settled group of agriculturists for a long time, and this constitutes their basic economy. Agriculture is the primary occupation and the basic economy of the Orāons of the Sunderban area also, but it is often supplemented by one or more subsidiary occupations such as daily labour, business, service, fishing etc.

Agriculture alone, cannot provide them with sufficient means of livelihood through-out the year (as the land holding in comparison to population is much less), and they have to supplement this with the earnings of the subsidiary sources. When they first came over here, they had to give up their traditional occupation i.e. agriculture, and labour formed their basic occupation. With the march of time, they gradually began to settle down by securing patches of land, and they again took to their previous occupation as means of livelihood. This mid-change in their livelihood pattern, which was for a short period, did not affect their life and culture to a considerable extent.

At present in the Sunderban area, agriculture still plays a vital role in Orāon economy, though a few of them have taken up other main occupations such as labour, business, service etc. on account of lack of agricultural land. Further,

those, among them, who are agriculturists (about 80% of the Orāons of the Sunderban area are agriculturists) spend about eight months in performing different agricultural operations, and during the remaining four months, they work as labourers in different brickfield centres of the area, Community and Block Development Projects, private sectors etc. They, generally, do not want to waste their time as they are gradually becoming conscious about the gap between their material wants and the economic worth of their primary occupation i.e. agriculture.

At present they are gradually becoming too conscious about cash income as they find that money is playing a dominant role now-a-days in their day-to-day activities. Hence, almost all of them are eager to earn cash wages during the slack period of agricultural activity.

Previously, besides labour, other subsidiary sources had little importance in their economy. They got little opportunity to sell their vegetable products, fish, egg, chicken etc. But at present, with increased facilities for easy contact with urban or semi-urban centres, they can easily sell their produce in the local markets or to the agents, and thereby earn cash money. Further, a large number of sophisticated and educated non-tribal people have begun to appreciate and utilise their secondary means of livelihood.

1. OCCUPATION:

In the early days of their settlement in the area of Sunderban, the Orāons started life here as labourers to clear the jungle and fell trees and to reclaim the land for future cultivation. Gradually these people set up an established life getting patches of land from their masters and started independent life with agriculture. These patches of land supplied them with the means of livelihood, and provided security to their life in spite of so many hazards of the Sunderban area such as cyclones, wild animals, diseases etc. Later on, their kindred from their original home-land and other places fol-

lowed them, and came up to this area year after year and started settling in this area.

Of these agriculturist people, some have land of their own and some are share-croppers or *bhāgchāsis*, and there are some who practise both. Those who have no land or work as *bhāgchāsis*, are mainly employed in the agricultural field as agricultural labourers, and sometimes as day labourers in other pursuits. Besides agriculture and labour, a few have other works as main occupation, such as service, business etc. There are a number of subsidiary occupations which bring them money to balance their deficit budget. Of these, agricultural labour, daily labour, work as domestic servants, priest-hood, craft, fishing, business, etc. are worth mentioning. One may have one or more subsidiary occupations. But there are a few secondary occupations which are carried out almost throughout the year. These are fishing, selling of different commodities such as garden products, fishes, eggs, fowl, *hāndiā* (rice-beer) etc. to the agents or in the local markets. Besides these, there are a few permanent secondary occupations such as priest-hood, domestic service, business (grocer's shop), craft making etc.

The women folk in addition to their household duties (which are their main occupations) and also the grown up children (12 years and above) work as agricultural labourers in the fields to partially meet the economic needs of the family. They also fish and sell different commodities to the local agents or in the local markets. But unlike in the Ranchi area, the seasonal migration for employment outside the district is almost insignificant.

The occupational pattern (both primary and secondary) of the Orāons of Ranchi district and also the castes and communities other than the Orāons of Sunderban is almost similar to that of the Orāons of this area, except that the Orāons of the Ranchi area have in addition, the seasonal migration, which takes place just after harvest in the month of December and ceases at the beginning of the ploughing season (April-May), and this brings them additional amount

of money and helps to some extent in meeting up their deficit budget.

2. LABOUR SYSTEM

Labour system of this area may be grouped under four broad categories.

(I) *Bhāgchās system* (Share-cropping):—

It is an arrangement made between a land-owner and a *chāsi* (farmer) by which each of the parties gets half of the total production of the land with the provision that the land-owner will supply the land and the *bhāgchāsi* will provide labour, the plough and the draught-animals. The seed is generally supplied by the land-owner but sometimes also by the share-cropper.

(II) *Bātā* :—

In this system a man (land owner or share-cropper) who has no plough and dragging animals of his own, takes these from his neighbour for once or more in a week, for ploughing and levelling the land. For this the land owner has to pay a certain amount of paddy annually which is generally given after the harvest to the owner of the plough and the animals.

(III) *Māhindar system* :—

In this system young boys or adult persons work in the house of a person as servants, and they are generally known as *Māhindars*. The *māhindar* generally grazes the cattle and works in the field. Besides these he also performs some household works such as bringing of fuel and water, taking care of garden, repairing of house and boundary walls, taking care of domestic animals etc. In exchange he is given food and lodging, and also some cash remuneration.

(IV) *Gharjāmāi system* :—

It is comparatively rare in this area. Sometimes a very poor Orāon serves in a rich Orāon's house for a certain period (which varies from four months to two years), and after the end of this period, the daughter of his master is given in marriage to him (according to the contract). During the

period of his service, he performs various types of works in the house of his would-be father-in-law. Another type of *gharjāmāi* system is prevalent in this area. In this system a man who lives after marriage in his father-in-law's house, serves and works for him. Both these types of *gharjāmāi* system are of rare occurrence now-a-days.

Besides the above types of labour system, there are two other types present among the Orāons of this area which signify their community co-operation. These two systems are mainly restricted among the Orāons, but sometimes these include other tribal groups, specially the Mundas of this area, but the Orāons do not practise these with other non-tribal groups. These are as follows:—

(V) *Begār*:—

This system is practised during transplantation. When an Orāon land-owner who has no means to afford labourers, and also has no sufficient men, animal and implement powers, the neighbouring Orāons themselves help him by preparing his field with plough, leveller etc. As remuneration, he gives them *hāndiā* (rice-beer). This man also helps his neighbours in similar way when needed.

(VI) *Gānthā* or *Badlā*:—

This system is based on mutual or rather symbiotic co-operation. In this case, an Orāon helps his neighbours with manual labour, animal and implement in his agricultural operation getting no remuneration, and in lieu of that when he is in need, his neighbours help him in the same way, in his agricultural operations.

In connection with *bhāgchās* (share-cropping), it may be stated that in West Bengal Land Reform Act, 1955 (Chapter II, Section 16—I A and B) it is written that the produce of any land cultivated by a *Bargādār* shall be divided between the *Bargādār* and the person whose land he cultivates:—

(a) In the proportion of 50: 50 in a case where plough, cattle, manure and seeds necessary for cultivation, are supplied by the person owning the land.

(b) In the proportion of 60 : 40 in all other cases.

But in this area the land-owner does not supply the *bhāgchāsis* with plough, cattle, manure etc. excepting land, still the yield is divided into 50 : 50 generally.

Regarding the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area Roy writes about the prevalence of the following labour systems: (1915: 194-199):

1. Dhangar—In this case a servant is employed on a system of a small amount of *pagri* (remuneration) and free board and lodging. The *pagri* is generally six to twelve *kats* (maunds) of paddy or a small annual sum of about Rs. 12/-. The *dhāngar* is generally employed after performing a ritual.

2. Pasri—It is of two types; the former type is somewhat similar to the *Bātā* system of the Sunderban area and the second one to the *Gānthā* or *Badlā* system of this area.

3. Soukhia—In this system, a man works with his own plough and cattle in exchange of food and lodging in a land owner's house who has no plough or cattle of his own.

4. Sajha—This system is almost similar to that of the previous one, except that the employee here performs all the operations in the land of the employer, and the output is divided between them in two equal shares.

5. Pacha—In this case the *dhangars* (members of the dormitory or *Dhumkuria*) work for a man during different operations (agriculture or socio-religious ceremonies). They perform these duties on the request of the man concerned, and get food and drink for the same.

6. Ghardijoa—This system is quite similar to that of the *Gharjāmāi* system of the Sunderban area.

But at present in the Chota-Nagpur area, all these systems are not equally in vogue. The incidence of occurrence of the share-cropping system is more than that of the *Soukhia*, *Ghardijōā* and *Pachā* systems which are gradually declining day by day.

3. INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

The income of an Orāon family of the Sunderban area in general, is very low. Their poor income cannot even meet

their basic requirements, and they are forced almost every year to contract loan or even to sell cattle or to mortgage land.

In order to present a clear-cut picture of the average income and expenditure of an Orāon family of the Sunderban area, the analysis of the data of 50 Orāon families (7 belonging to Above Rs. 100/- Income group and the rest Below Rs. 100/- Income group) of a particular village (Boyarmari) of this area is given below which may be taken as a general picture of the Orāons of other villages of this area.

For convenience of the analysis of the data the families have been put into two categories. (i) those having a monthly income of above Rs. 100/- and (ii) those below that level.

TABLE V

Income group	Average Annual Income per family in Rupees	Average Annual expenditure per family in Rupees	Average per capita Annual income in Rupees	Average per capita Annual Expenditure in Rupees
Above Rs. 100/-	2168.80	2023.60	361.49	404.72
Below Rs. 100/-	592.60	635.52	118.52	127.10

Table V shows that the average annual income per family of the Orāons of the first group of this village is Rs. 2168.80 which really is considerably high in comparison to the second group which has an average annual income per family of Rs. 592.60. Whatever small saving is seen from the average of the figures of the former group is really due to a little better condition. Further, this small saving is not a constant figure every year but fluctuates. The Sunderban area is subjected to frequent natural calamities like floods and cyclones etc., and these are mainly responsible for the fluctuations in their annual income. The condition is far worse with the people of the second income group (below Rs. 100) who even in normal condition cannot balance their budget,

and every year meet an average deficit of Rs. 37.92 per family and Rs. 8.58 per capita which is met by borrowing, and this debt goes on accumulating every year, and the condition is rendered worse by natural calamities like cyclones etc.

4. INDEBTEDNESS

The factors which are mainly responsible for the miserable income of these people, particularly of the low income groups, are small land holdings, old techniques of cultivation, infrequent use of fertilisers and general ill health. Their addiction to excessive drinking adds to their miseries. Further, they have to incur expenditure for repairing of huts, procuring agricultural implements, seeds and also for different socio-religious ceremonies which can not be avoided. These deficits are to be met by borrowing, and as the interest has to be paid, additional loans have to be incurred every year, thus leading to an increase in the total load of their indebtedness year after year.

Roy in connection with the habit of indebtedness among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur says, "their own improvident habits and their lamentable love of liquor, are to a great extent responsible for their chronic indebtedness..." (1915: 205). Pointing out the relation between the Orāons and the money-lenders, Roy states, "Once an Orāon gets into the clutches of this Indian Shylock, it becomes extremely difficult to extricate himself from his grip. The paltry initial debt goes on swelling enormously by a process which the simple Orāon can never understand". (1915: 203).

So far as the problem of habitual indebtedness is concerned, the position of the Sunderban Orāons is thus seen not to differ much from what Roy observed a few decades ago about the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area.

The increasing load of debts often forces an Orāon to sell his cattle or to mortgage his land or sell it, and he surrenders himself to his fate.

Table VI gives the analysis of the data about indebtedness of the Orāons of Boyārmāri village.

The incidence of indebtedness among the Orāons is quite

TABLE VI

Average cash loan taken by debtor's family in Rupees	Average paddy loan taken by debtor's family in Kg	Average amount of inherited cash debts in Rupees	Average total of the debt incurred by his predecessor and by debtor himself in Rupees	Average cash loan repaid by the debtor in Rupees	Average paddy loan repaid by the debtor in Kg.
107.48	46.36	19.64	127.12	9.08	7.24

high, and it is interesting to note that most of these persons not only carry the load of their own debt but also inherit such burdens even from their grand father, father or any other senior member of the family. If a man happens to die before the repayment of his debts, incurred during his life-time, this invariably devolves upon a person who normally inherits his property.

On an analysis of Table VI it is seen that where the average cash loan per family is Rs. 107.48 and average paddy loan is 46.36 kg., the repayment of cash loan is Rs. 9.08 and that of paddy loan is 7.24 kg. only. Further, the burden of debt is enhanced by the load of cash loan incurred by elders of his family previously which is Rs. 19.64 on an average, raising the total loan to Rs. 127.12 on an average.

Thus, the above mentioned facts and figures quite significantly reveal the miserable economic condition of these people of the Sunderban area.

These people take loans both in cash and kind (mainly in the form of paddy), from various sources, with variable rates of interest.

These loans are taken more often from private sources (money lenders of different communities) than from Public Sectors.

Table VII gives in detail a clear idea of the different sources of loan, rates of interest charged, security etc.

In spite of the very high rate of interest charged by the local money lenders, the Orāons more often take loan from them.

TABLE VII

Sources of loan	Regularly Orāon indebted from different sources	No. of families	Kind of loan and Rate of Annual interest	Nature of security	Average area of security
Hindu,	Hindu	30.4%	Cash {	Govt.	6 $\frac{1}{4}$ %
Muslim,	Muslim	22.2%		Private	25%
Orāon,	Orāon	18.5%		Govt.	
Govt.	Govt.			5% to 7%	Land
grain gola	grain gola	28.9%	Paddy {		27 decimal of land
				Co-op.	
				grain	
				gola 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ %	
				Private	50%

rather than availing themselves of the opportunities of taking loan from Paddy Marketing Societies or from Co-operative Grain Golas mainly due to insufficiency of these facilities. When they need money, they approach private sources as these are often near their own village and secure these loans quite easily and do not take the trouble of approaching any Government or Co-operative sources which are generally situated at some distance from their places.

In a number of cases, the debtor cannot repay the loan in due time, and as the time passes the repayable amount increases, and as a result the land of the poor people is exposed to the risk of slipping off from their hands inspite of the protective measures of the Government.

5. ASSETS

The assets of an Orāon household generally consist of the following:—land, house, livestock, household utensils and furniture, implements, ornaments etc., but the amount of these assets varies according to the economic condition of the people.

Table VIII gives an idea about the valuation of different types of assets on an average in an Orāon household as per

TABLE VIII

Assets	Income group above Rs. 100/-	Income group below Rs. 100/-
Land	8750.00	2252.50
Domicile	415.00	202.50
Live Stock	1401.50	515.30
Other (Domestic utensils, furniture implements, ornaments etc.)	475.60	285.90

income groups. (The data were collected from the Orāons of Boyārmāri village).

Due to the unstable economy and high indebtedness, the value of the assets often changes. The poor people are often forced to part with their land by mortgage or sell.

The traditional Orāon economy was based on self-sufficiency and in some degree on economic isolation. They used to consume their own production. Their requirements were few and they met these with their production by reciprocity or by the barter system. But due to different external and/or internal forces, and with the rise of the standard of living, their some-what self-sufficient economy became modified and they were forced to leave their village (temporarily/permanently) in search of cash earnings.

They have now been accustomed to comparatively more items of food than before, and quite a number of them has to be procured by purchase. Further, addiction to heavy drinking has increased, more often by getting the same from the grog-shop which is also another major source of the drainage off their income.

Further, more items of clothings are used by them than before, and the cost of these has also increased considerably. In addition, they have also been accustomed to different items of consumer goods, cheap cosmetics and ornaments etc., and some household utensils of aluminium or other metals

are gradually replacing the traditional earthen wares. This is also another source of strain on their economy.

Further, the productions on their land are restricted because of their not adopting modern improved farm practices, and even this is often reduced by flood of saline water which is a curse to the Sunderban area. Natural calamities like cyclones, rains etc., not infrequently cause damage or destruction of their houses which cost considerable amount for repairs almost every year.

On the top of all these, inspite of their miserable economic condition, they have not learnt to avoid undertaking a number of socio-religious festivals even by borrowing.

Roy, in connection with the economy of the Ranchi Orāons, said, "Ill-housed, ill-clad, and underfed, generally over taxed by the landlord, frequently oppressed by the money-lender, and occasionally duped by labour-recruiter or fleeced by the law-tout, the Orāon of Chotā-Nāgpur has indeed had an exceptionally hard lot in life" (1915: 207) "The necessity of earning more cash income", as stated by Lall²⁶ has compelled the Orāons to leave hunting, fishing and collecting forest produce (1960: 111: 2: 85) The rather self-sufficient economy of the Ranchi Orāons has greatly been modified by these factors as also by the reduction in the per capita land holding, which, in a way forced them to look round for more cash income by migration to industrial, and plantation centres etc., seasonally or even permanently.

Thus, from the foregoing discussions it may be said that the economy of the Orāons of both Ranchi and Sunderban areas has undergone a good deal of modifications, though to different degrees and by different factors; the previous self-sufficient economy has almost disappeared from their present economic system, rendering the struggle for existence more acute. This is not peculiar to Sunderban Orāons alone but other people of the locality also suffer more or less from such economic difficulties as the conditions of life of all these people hardly differ from one another.

CHAPTER IV

DIALECT

Kurukh of the Dravidian speech family, is the traditional dialect of the Orāons; and even in these days it continues to be so in the Ranchi area, though partly influenced by Hindi of the non-tribal elements there.

After migration to the Sunderban area, the limited number of Orāons had to work amongst an overwhelmingly large number of Bengali speaking people, and naturally they learnt Bengali dialect for speaking with the Bengalee people, and in course of time a new form of dialect, known locally as *Sādri* dialect, developed for talking even amongst themselves, which is a mixture of Hindi and Bengali to a great extent with perhaps some elements of their original *Kurukh*.

The Orāons of this tract, speak in *Sādri* when speaking among themselves or with other tribal and caste people (who migrated from Bihar side). But while speaking with the local Bengalee people, they speak in fluent Bengali.

To illustrate the pattern of *Sādri* dialect as used by the Orāons of Sunderban, a few examples are given below:—

STORY IN SĀDRI DIALECT (SUNDERBAN)

Ektā Kāṭhuriā Gāch Kāṭāt Rāhe. Kopāte Kopāte Hāt Se Tāngā Phuchak Gelei, Pānīme Gir Gelei. Tākhān Kāṭhuriā

Kānde Lāg'ei. Sekhan Ek Debatā Sonāker Ṭaṅgā Lekun Āsilkar, Kahāten, "Toi Kāre Kāndāten?" Tākhān Se Kahāten, "Gāch Kāṭāt Kāṭāt Ṭaṅgā Hāt Se Pānime Phuchak Gelei. Hāmi Sei lāgun Kāndāti". Debatā Ek Sonār Ṭaṅgā Lekar Kahāten "I Ṭaṅgā Ki Tor Hi?" Tākhān Se Kahāthe, "I Ṭaṅgā Hāmār Nā Lāge. Hāmār Ṭaṅgā Rahe Lohāke. Tabē Hāmi Sonār Ṭaṅgā Leke Kā Kari?" Tākhān Debatā Kahā'ei, "Kānhe Toi Kāndāthin. Toke Hāmi Bhālo Bhābe Lohāk Ār Sonāk Ṭaṅgā De Deoāthi. Tui I Lekun Ghar Jā."

A wood-cutter was felling a tree. During the cutting of the tree, suddenly his axe slipped off from his hand and fell into water. The wood-cutter then burst into tears. Then a god appeared before him with an axe, made of gold and asked, "Why are you crying?" He said, "I am weeping as my axe has suddenly fallen into water during cutting the tree". Showing the golden axe, the god asked, "Is it your axe?". He answered, "This is not my axe. My axe is made of iron and not of gold? Then what shall I do with this axe of gold? Then the god was much pleased with him and said, "Don't weep, I am giving you both these iron and gold axes. Go home with these."

CONVERSATION IN SĀDRI DIALECT (SUNDERBAN)

1. Kāndan: *Thākurdā, Kālke Jābe to Hāmār Ghare Bheloā-phārek Hui?*

Debal: *Hān, Sab Jogār Patrā Ho Gelai?*

Kāndan: *Hān, Hāmār Sab Jogār Patrā Ho Gelei Hāa.*

Kāndan: O Thakurda, are you coming to my house to-morrow to attend the Bheloā phari?

Debal: Yes! have you completed all arrangements?

Kāndan: Yes! I have arranged everything.

2. Gopal : (Āpan Bohuke)—*Ei Chotobāhu, Chotobāhu Ek Gilās Pāni De Hāmke Piās lāig Hāa. Hām Pāni Khāba*".

Gopal : (to his wife),— O Chotobāhu Chotobāhu, give me a glass of water. I am very thirsty. I want to drink.

3. Jamai: *Hā, Bā Kā Kārāthin?*

Sasur: *Āa Bābu, Hām Hoglāke Bāndhatī.*

Jamai: *Bāndhke Kā Karbe?*

Sasur: *Pirāker Jhāp Bānābe.*

Son-in-law— O father, what are you doing?

Father-in-law Come, my son, I am tying the hoglas.

Son-in-law: What's the use of tying?

Father-in-law: To make covering for the varendah.

From the wordings of the story and the conversations in *Sunderbani Sādri*, it may easily be seen that this is mostly a crude admixture of corrupt Bengali and Hindi. As already stated, this *Sādri* is used for talking amongst themselves.

But in most of the songs and *mantras* (incantations), the influence of *Sādri* is insignificant as compared to that of Bengali. Some of the songs and *mantras* are in mixed form though the Bengali influence is more remarkable than *Sādri*. A few examples of this type are given below:—

SONG (MIXED)

*Bāo Nā Bātāso Nāhi
Pātā Keno Nari Go
Hāmi Rājār Beti Māgo
Bīdēse Behirali Go*

There is no wind, no movements, still why the leaves are moving? Mother, I am a daughter of a king and have come out to foreign land,

MANTRA (MIXED)

*Bhagabān Unke Bhāt Khiālī
Ei Monkar Mukhe Ekṭu
Kānchā Pāni Dili
Bhagabān Tor Nām Kore.*

Bhagawān, I have given you food to eat . Now I am giving you water (to wash your mouth).

A few examples are cited below in order to give an idea about the immense influence of the regional Bengali dialect over their dialect i.e. Sādri. Further, these examples also show that in these cases the influence of Hindi is negligible.

CONVERSATION IN BENGALI

1. Kālāchānd Kāchuā (Orāon)—“*O Kestadā, O Dhāre Base Āchhen Keno? Edike Ekbār Āsun. Akṭā Kājer Kathā Āchhe.*”

Kesta Mondal (Bagdi)—*Dārā Kālāchānd, Ekṭu Pare Jachchi*”.

Kalachand Kachua (an Orāon)—Oh Kestada, why are you sitting over there? Will you please come here? I have got something important to discuss with you.

Kesto Mandal (a Bagdi)—Wait Kalachand, I am coming after a while.

2. Ramdas Bāro: *O Āminuddin Sāheb, Āmi Kāl Sakāle Āpnār Kāchhe Jābo. Ekṭu Darkār Achhe, Āpni Bāri Thākben To?*

Aminuddin Mondal : *Hān Thākbo.*

Ramdas Baro: “O Aminuddin Saheb, I shall go to your place tomorrow in the morning. I have some business with you. Will you be at home?”

Aminuddin : Yes, I shall stay.

SONGS IN BENGALI

1. *Gāndā Raila Sāri Sāri*

Kalā Raila Dui Gāri

Bechhe Bechhe Tul Tusu

Kāl Jābi Sasur Bāri

Plenty of Merigold and two cartloads of plantains are here. Select and pick up whatever you like Tusu, as you will go to your father-in-law's house tomorrow.

2. *Māgo Mā Nadir Dhāre*

Kisser Bājnā Bājichhe?

Rājār Beṭā Bihā Karite Āsichhe

Tārī Bājnā Bājichhe.

Mother, what music is being played on the river side?
It is the music of the wedding procession of the Prince, who
is coming to marry.

MANTRA (INCANTATIONS).

In Bengali

1. *Sonek lāngāl Rupek Phāl*
Bāgh Baldā Jurlām Hāl
Tāite Uṭhlo Kālo Māṭi
Tāite Bunlām Sarser Āṭi.

To the plough, made of gold and share, made of silver,
I harness tiger and bullock to, drag it. By tilling the ground
with this plough, the blacksoil is exposed into which I
planted the mustard seedling.

2. *Ghar Bāndi Dor Bāndi*
Bāndi Pirār Pāṭ
Anukoṭi Dākini Bāndi
Die Lohār Sāṭ

I seal the house, the entrance, the outbreak of the
diseases and also million spirits by the iron peg.

The above illustrations clearly demonstrate the extensive
infiltration of local Bengali dialect into their conversations,
mantras, songs, etc., and even in the form of 'Sādrī' used by
them.

In the Ranchi area, the Orāons are using the *Kurukh*
dialect influenced by Hindi. An idea of *Kurukh* dialect may
be had from the following extracts quoted from Roy.

STORY (KURUKH)

Innā mündhūntā pūrkhār gāhi kāhini-kaththā tānga-
lagdan. Belātpūr bēlas rāksas telā-khūtā-nu-khūtā-lāgiās
Bēlas sāika-tikhil chūnjtā-lāgiās. Hormār sāikha-tikhil cherā
lāgiar. Rākas hormārin mokkhās. Abiri ontā rāṇḍi
pāchchogé tāngdas rāhchās. As jāhi pāli mānjā tikhil cherā-
gé. Bēlāsgahi ālar kerār chertā-gē. Ā chendās sāukārās-gūiā

jonkh rahchas. “*Gūchā bābü, nighāé pāli cherā-ge*”. *Tāngio chi khā hellrā* “*Ontā eklā engdas, mokhochio rākās*. (1915: 444—445)

Today I am telling the original story of (i.e. as told by our) ancestors: The King of Belātpur used to tie up a Rākṣās (monster) to a stump of *tela* (marking nut) tree. The King was getting his *Sāika*-rice threshed. All (men) were carrying *Sāika*-rice. The Rākṣās devoured the men. At that time (i.e. in those days) an old widow had a son. It was now his turn to carry rice. The king’s men went to make him carry rice. The boy was a servant in a rich man’s house. (They said) “Let us go, young man, it is now your turn to carry (rice)”. His mother began to weep (and said) “One only son (I have); the Rākṣās will devour even (him)”. (1915: 463—464)

SONGS (KURUKH)

1. *Khoiondrkā Kānnān,*
Hoā bhāiyāre sendrā ṭonkā,
Chitrā mākān lāoāge,
Hoā bhāiyāre sendrā ṭonkā.
 (1915: 159)

The arrow by the son’s bride brought. Do take it to the hunting ground! To kill the striped deer, brother, Do take it to the hunting-ground. (1915: 159)

2. *Telā dābsā Gosāin, makkā debsā!*
Gosāin sārem!
Hāe-re Khāddi monoey, Hāe-re
Phāgū mānoey
Gosāin Sārem!
Hio-hi-dal-dal Hio-hi dal-dal!

(O Keond tree God! O Sāl tree God
 The Phāgū God! The Sarhūl God!
 O it is Sarhūl now! O it is Phāgū
 The Phāgū God! The Sārhūl God!
 Come! Let us play! Let us play!)
 (1915: 200)

Besides the above examples of *Kurukh* dialect of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, as given above, a few more examples of 'Sādri' dialect as used by the Orāons of the same area are given from Roy.

SONG

Sādri (Chotā-Nāgpur)

Sumirāṇā Karū gūrū sumirāṇā

Karū deo,

Āj ūtar dakhin ké sumirāṇā

Karū deo,

Sumirāṇā karū gūrū sumirāṇā

Karū deo,

Āj pūrāb pachim ke sumirāṇā

Karū deo.

(1915: 286-287)

"Do thou call up, O Gūrū (Master)!"

Do thou call up.

Do thou call up today (all the spirits)

From the north and the south.

Do thou call up, O Gūrū

Do thou call up.

Do thou call up today (all the spirits)

from the east and the west.

(1915: 288)

INCANTATION

Sādri (Chotā Nāgpur)

2. *hānth joṛ ārjī bāñhi joṛ binti*
nandan, dinem ratim, dheyān
nandan sājhe bihān dheyān
nandan, ākkil geyān chiyā Bābā.

(1915: 355)

We pray to Thee with folded hands and crossed arms day and night; we meditate on Thee, in the morning and evening. O Father, give us knowledge and wisdom. (1915: 355)

From the above illustrations, the distinction between the *Sādri* of the lower-Bengal Orāons and that of the Chotā Nāgpur Orāons can easily be made out.

Now, we illustrate the difference between the *Sādri* of these two regions by quoting the same story and conversations as spoken in the respective areas:—

IN SĀDRI OF SUNDERBAN AREA

...*Eklā Rākhā! Rāikhi. Se Gāru Chorāa Geloi. Gāru charāte charate “Bāgh” “Bāgh” Kaikun Chachalei. Tākhān Gerāmer Lok Sab Lāthi Ṭhengā Leke Kudke Ālāi. Se Tākhān Hāsti Lāglei. Sei Man Āile Dekhlei Mankar Bhire Bāgh Nei Khe Chhuchhāiker Ṭhakate. Se Kun Umār Rāge Chali Gelei. Ekdin Sātai Bāgh Ālei. Sekhān Rākhā! Chhorā Chechālei, “Bāgh Ālei Hā āike”. Sekhān Keo Ār Na Gelai. Bāghṭā Chhorāke Dhārke Mār Dilei.*

IN SĀDRI OF CHOTĀ NĀGPUR AREA

Ontē addo khapus rahchus. As rose gayam khapa lagias. Gayam khapunum khapunum onghon onghon lakra barcha lakra barcha baaer ki garara lagias. As ghi gahi lathi gulli ondrarki bara lagier. Lakra mal erer ki khishra ki kirra lagier khane aas jor se alkha lagius. On thul manim onte lakra barcha. Aas gool nana helras ki lakra barcha sahayla nana. Lakin ne hnu mal barchar khane lakra asin pitiya. Eka se has nanjas annem kechas.

STORY IN ENGLISH

There was a cow boy. He used to tend cows. During tending the cows, he sometimes cried out, ‘tiger’ ‘tiger’. Hearing his shout, the villagers came running with rods and clubs. He then burst out into laughter. But seeing no tiger, they thought it to be a fun and went away angrily. One day a tiger actually came. He cried out, “Help me, the tiger has

come." But no one came to help him that day. The tiger killed him.

CONVERSATION (IN SĀDRI OF SUNDERBAN AREA)

Bhāi—Dādā Kāhā Jāthin? Kon Kāje Jāthin? Dādā Nā Hirei, Hāme Ekṭu Kālinagar Jāthi Lagā Kine. Tor Bhauṣhi Ker Lugā Chhir Gelei Hāa. Tāiṭe Kiṇe Jāthi.

IN SĀDRI OF CHOTĀ NĀGPUR AREA

Chu—"Dada, Nim eksan kaday? Nim ender ge Kaḍlay?"
Dada—"En Kālinagar kadan kichei khenda sari ge kichri mela. Aadi gahi Kichri ētrra kera. Khane en Khenda Ka Kadam".

ENGLISH

Younger brother,—Brother, where are you going? What for are you going? Elder Brother —"I am going to Kalinagar to purchase a cloth. Your sister-in-law has no cloth. Her cloth has been torn. So, I am going to purchase it".

From the above illustrations, the differences in the pattern of the present day Orāon dialects of these two different regions may be observed.

The emergence of a new form of dialect among the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal is nothing unusual. This would happen whenever a small group of people would be transplanted to a different region with another language without any regular link or communication with the parent stock. The immigrants would gradually imbibe the local language to such an extent as to develop a new dialect of a mixed type.

The influence of the local environment has not only been manifest in the development of their new dialect but is discernible in other spheres of their life and activities as would be seen in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER: V

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The endogamous Orāon society of the Sunderban area is patriarchate in nature (i.e. the males of this society enjoy superior status). It is usually characterised by descent, inheritance and succession reckoned through the male, patrilocal residence, and the subordination of women and children. It is internally divided into a number of exogamous totemistic sibs (a pseudo-kinship or unilateral extended lineage group in a community) known as *gotors* or *gotros*. Each sib or *gotro* consists of a number of families, and they are distributed in different villages or in different hamlets or *pārās* of villages. Phratry and moiety systems which are found among a few other tribal groups of India, are absent among them. Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, the village forms the most important social unit, with a definite territorial boundary, having mutual relations in different aspects of socio-economic and socio-cultural affairs amongst its members (who may be both tribals as well non-tribals). As regards the Orāon society of Chotā-Nāgpur, Roy states, "The present social organization of the Orāons is the archaic organization of the ancient Orāon hunting communities adopted to the needs of the more complex agricultural village-communities of later days" (1915: 324)

I. SIB :

As previously stated, the Orāons of this southern portion of the Deltaic West Bengal are divided into a number of exogamous totemic divisions, known as 'sibs' (*gotors* or *gotros*), which are unilineal groups of relatives, multilocal in settlement, and the members of which are determined by unilateral descent, actual or *putative*, with *ipso-facto* obligation of an exclusive kind. In connection with the Orāon clan (sib) organisation in the Chotā-Nāgpur area, Roy says, "For purpose of exogamy the whole tribe is to this day divided into a number of clans (sibs) or gotros" (1915: 324). Among the Orāons of the Deltaic Bengal, no sub-sib is present and also the single-sib village i.e. a village inhabited totally by the members of one sib only is absent. All the Orāon villages of this area are multisib villages i.e. Orāons of different sibs live in a village.

The peculiar totemistic feature is the basis of the sib organization of the Orāons of the Sunderban area, the organization which controls the social and to a some extent religious affairs of this society. The Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area also have the same feature. Roy, on the totemism of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, writes, "Totemism which was the basis of social and political organization of the Orāons in what may be roughly called the hunting and pastoral stages of Orāon culture, still forms the fundamental feature of their social organisation in so far as kinship, marriage and relations of the sexes are concerned" (1915 : 324).

In connection with the totemistic sib organisation, it may, however, be noted here that the powerful traditional sib organization, which once played a dominant role in the socio-political and socio-religious life of the Orāons, does not have much influence now-a-days over the Orāons of both Chotā-Nāgpur and Sunderban area; this is mainly due to the influence of Christianity in the Ranchi area and Hinduism in the Bengal area, and also due to the impact of modernisation, urbanisation, industrialisation etc. Thus, the people are also gradually losing their traditional tendency of implicit faith in and strict adherence to the characteristics of totemism in their

sib organization. Now-a-days, the functional value of the sib is mainly restricted to the regulation of marriages.

(A) ORIGIN OF TOTEMS:

The Orāons of the Sunderban area have little or no idea about the origin of their sibs or *gotros*. Many of them even do not know the actual meaning of the *gotros*. All that they know is that, the flora and fauna at their past and present habitats, have supplied the bulk of their totemic names; and these totemic animals and plants are believed to have helped or protected or rendered some peculiar service to their ancestors, who, out of gratitude, took their sib names from these animals or plants. The present day Orāons of the Ranchi area also are not quite fully aware of the origin of these sibs or *gotros*. Roy has described the origin of some of these totemic clans (sibs) of the Orāons (1915 : 327-328), some of which are given below :—

- i. *Kujur*—While an Orāon had fallen asleep under a *Kujur* plant, a flexible twig of the plant entwined round his body and protected him from molestation. Accordingly, the man took the *Kujur* plant for his totem; and his descendants now form the men of *Kujur* clan (sib).
- ii. *Kisputtā*—An Orāon killed a pig and ate its flesh, but threw away its entrails. The life of the pig remained in the entrails, so that the slain pig was soon afterwards found moving in actual bodily form. Henceforth pig's entrails became tabooed to the slayer of the pig and his descendants, and they came to constitute the *Kisputtā* (*kis* = pig, *putta* = entrails) clan (sib).
- iii. *Khālkho*—An Orāon was fishing in a stream. A *Khālkho* fish which was caught in his net, managed to escape. Thenceforward, the *Khālkho* fish became tabooed to the man and his descendants, who came to be called men of the *Khālkho* clan (sib).
- vi. *Ekkā* or *Kāchuā*—While an old Orāon was about to catch a tortoise, the latter exclaimed, "I am

your *jāt* (caste-fellow)." And so the man desisted from catching it, and his descendants came to form the Tortoise (*Kāchuā* or *Ekkā*) clan (sib).

(B) RULE OF SIB EXOGAMY:

On account of the rule of sib exogamy, no Orāon of this area is allowed to marry within the same sib or *gotro* i.e. a man of *Bār'lā* sib must not marry a girl from *Bār'lā* sib, but should find out his mate from another sib other than *Barla*. The pre-marital sex relation between the members of the same sib is also prohibited, as these people believe that the members of the same sib have descended from a common ancestor; and, as such, they are all blood relatives. Roy, in connection with the totem and sex taboos of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, says, "Although the members of an Orāon clan (sib) do not believe in their actual descent from their totem animal or plant, they regard themselves as descendants of a common ancestor, and, as such, blood relatives between whom marriage or sexual intercourse is not permissible." (1915: 328). About the clan (sib) rule for marriage of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, he writes, "Although an Orāon may not marry into his own totem (i.e. father's totem), he may marry into the totem of his mother" (1915: 330).

This type of restriction is also prevalent among the Orāons of the Sunderban area. Though, as a rule, marriage in the mother's sib is not prohibited here, still many Orāons of this tract try to secure mates firstly from the sibs other than that of the mother.

Though, as a rule, sib endogamy is prohibited, and though an Orāon thinks it to be incestuous, still in a few cases such a thing i.e. marriage within the same sib takes place. In most of such cases, either love plays the prominent role or pre-marital impregnation leads to such an act. In such cases, the parents of both parties or the persons concerned, have to pay a fine to the village (community) Panchayet. After this, they are allowed to lead a normal social life. But until and unless they pay the fine to

Panchayet, they are treated as outcaste from the society; and, as such, have no right to attend the different socio-religious festivities and different other functions of the village. But the incidence of occurrence of such type of union (intra-sib marriage) among the Sunderban Orāons is insignificantly small.

In Ranchi district also, this type of union occurs sometimes, and the cases are judged in the same way as of the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

But due to the influence of Christianity and also due to easy availability of jobs in different working centres, such as tea-gardens, mills, mines etc., the frequency of such type of union is slightly higher than that of the Sunderban area. If a man marries in such a way, and if the Panchayet tries to punish him for his deed, he, instead of bending to the verdict of the village Panchayet, often goes to any cash-crop garden or to factories or mines (where the local village Panchayet has no influence) as labourer with his wife, disobeying the social rule. Again, the baptised Orāons sometimes do not care the verdict of the village Panchayet. It was sometimes seen during pre-independence period, that these people were protected by the Christian Missions. Roy has also found such instances among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur area, and about which he writes, "Some premarital intrigue leading to inconvenient consequences resulted in a permanent union which was ultimately sanctioned by the village and the *Parha* to which the man belonged, only on the latter having paid a fine and provided a feast to the *Parha brethren*. After the offending pair is thus formally readmitted into the tribe, and their union thus legalized, their sons are considered as good as legal heirs born of lawful wedlock (1915: 329)

(C) TOTEMIC TABOO:

"As a general rule, an Orāon must abstain from eating, or otherwise using, domesticating, killing, destroying, maiming, hurting or injuring the animal or plant or other objects

that form his totem; nor must he use anything made of it or obtained from it; and, when practicable, he will prevent others from doing so in his presence. In the case of tree totems, the men of the clan (sib) will neither go under the shade of the tree nor cut or burn its wood nor use its produce in any shape" (Roy: 1915:330). If an Orāon finds the totemic object lying dead on the way, he covers it by some means so that it cannot be eaten up by some birds or beasts, and goes away after saluting it.

This type of rigidity regarding totemic taboo has been much slackened now-a-days. At present, in some cases they only do not eat or kill the totemic objects. In the Ranchi area, the Christian Orāons pay little respect to these totemic objects, and also do not obey all these taboos fully. When the totemic object is an article of daily necessity or any indispensable article of diet or household use, the Orāons of the Sunderban area somehow rationalise the same and modify the totemic taboo. The members of *Dhānwār* (meaning paddy) *gotro*, instead of abstaining from eating rice or using paddy, say that *Dhānwār* does not mean all kinds of paddy, but a particular variety (which is not common in this area), and use all other types of paddy available in the locality. The same type of rationalisation is done by the members of *Nun* or *Laban* (salt) *gotro*, who do not think their totemic object to be the common variety of salt, and accordingly modified the totem to a special variety.

The same type of modification was also noticed by Roy among Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area at the dawn of the 20th Century. About this he writes, "Instead of abstaining altogether from the use of paddy, Orāons of the *Khes* or paddy clan (sib) abstain only from eating the thin scum that forms on the surface of rice-soup when it stands unagitated in a cool place...In the same way men of the Iron clan (sib) have only to abstain from touching iron with their lips or tongue, but may use iron in any other way they like" (1915 : 331).

(D) SIB-DESCENT:

As the descent is reckoned patrilineally, the sons and unmarried daughters get their father's sib i.e. a son of *Khālkhō* father must be a *Khālkhō*. The married daughters generally take their husbands' sibs or in a few cases may retain their father's sib. In such cases, they have to observe taboos relating to both their father's as well as their husbands' sibs. This is also found among the present day Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area as was also reported by Roy regarding the Orāons of his time.

(E) SPLIT-TOTEM:

Among the Orāons of Sunderban 'split-totem' is found. Dr. Frazer²⁷ has described 'split totem' as follows: "the segmentation of a single original clan (sib) which had a whole animal for its totem into a number of totems, either of which took the name either of a part of the original animal or of a subspecies of it". Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area the sibs, *Kiss*, *Suar* and *Kālaharin*, are indicated by the totemic object 'Pig' and the sib *Kisputtā* has its totem as 'Pig's entrails'. Split-totems are also found among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur plateau.

(F) MULTIPLE TABOOS:

The presence of multiple taboos among the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur regarding a clan (sib), as said by Roy, is not clearly seen among Orāons of the Sunderban area. But in a few cases, the members of a particular sib observe multiple-taboo regarding the totem object. In this case, the taboo extends to the other similar objects, which have a real or fancied resemblance to the totem, or may happen to bear the same or even a similar name as the totems, and taboo is observed in connection with all these objects. In Chotā-Nāgpur, for example, the members of *Lākrā* or *Bāgh* sib

(tiger) in addition to their observing taboo in connection with *Bāgh* also extend it to squirrel as squirrel's skin is also striped.

(G) TRANSFORMATION OF TOTEM NAME:

Roy is of opinion that in a few cases among the Orāons, a double totem appears to have arisen from the anxiety felt by a particular totem to change a totem name into a more respectable one. He has shown that in a few villages in Ranchi district, the members of the *Kisputtā* (pig's entrails) clan (sib), when asked as to their *gotro* or sib, gave their clan (sib) name as *Kasai* (a kind of tree). They, besides observing the customary taboos regarding Pig, also observe the taboos in addition with regard to the *Kasai* tree. But we did not come across such type of transformation of totem names among the Orāons of the Deltaic Bengal.

Though we could not trace any type of transformation of totem objects, we noted an interesting feature here. Some of the members of *Kinduār* sib often declare themselves as belonging to *Shol* sib also, as the meaning of both these two sibs is same (a kind of fish). Similarly, some members of *Kiss* sib often say that they belong to *Suan* or *Kālaharīn* sib and vice versa, as the meaning of all these totemic objects is pig.

(H) TOTEM-WORSHIP:

Roy has remarked that among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, 'there are wooden, brass or earthen emblems of the totemic objects which they carry on their way during *Jātrā* festival. Before such a *Jātrā* party leaves its own village, the village priest (*Pāhān*) puts vermilion marks on the emblems, sacrifices a chicken and offers a little rice-bear to these effigies. On their way (from their own village to the *Jātrā*-ground), if the members of such party happen to halt in any village, the clan (sib) emblems are taken to the *ākhrā* of that village, and offerings of rice-bear and chicken are made by

the men of that village. About the significance of these wooden, clay or brass figures, they speak of these to be the ancient emblems of the village or point towards the totem symbols of the *Bhuinhārs* or the first Orāon settlers of the village. But this type of totem-worship is not in vogue among the Orāons of this Sunderban area. They have no earthen, brass or wooden models representing these totemic objects. But during many *pujās*, they utter the names of the respective sibs, and show due regards by saluting these. In this connection, it may be said, that the Orāons of Southern Bengal, unlike their kinsmen in the Ranchi area, have no *Pārkhā* flag which are carried and hoisted during *Jātrā* and other religious ceremonies.

The above discussions give some idea regarding the characteristics of Orāon totems and sibs of Sunderban as well as of the Ranchi area. Previously, the general attitude of an Orāon to his sib-totem was that of a man to his equal, to his friend and ally. But this attitude is almost decaying among the Orāons of the present day of both the areas for which the puritanistic socio-religious and political ideas are somewhat responsible. Migration to new environment and contact with different advanced neighbouring communities and also the breach of the cultural link with the homeland have further accelerated this process. At present, the totemic grouping of the Orāons which was once the most vital and basic social unit, exerts its functional jurisdiction to some extent only in marriage and kinship of the society.

(I) SIBS OF THE ORAONS OF DIFFERENT AREAS:

Table IX gives the sib (*gotro*) of the Orāons of different localities (Sunderban, Chotā-Nāgpur and Tea-gardens of North East India). The sibs of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur are described by different authors (Dalton,²³ Risley²⁹ and Roy³⁰) and those of the Orāons of the Tea Estates of N.-E. India are taken from a survey in tea-garden areas of Jalpaiguri by the Cultural Research Institute, West Bengal, and

also from the Handbook on Castes and Tribes⁵¹ (Tea District Labour Association). The sibs of the Orāons of Ranchi district were collected in 1959 from a few villages of Mandar police station by the present authors.

From Table IX, it is seen that a number of sibs as collected by Dalton, Risley and Roy in different areas of the country, are totally absent among the Orāons of the Sunderban area. Among the Orāon immigrants of the Sunderban area, a number of new sibs has developed which are not found among the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur. Some of the sibs of the Orāons of the Tea garden areas are quite different from those present in Ranchi district or in the Sunderban area. An interesting thing that may be noticed among the Orāons of the Sunderban area is that some Orāons have *Kiss*, some *Suār* and some *Kālaharin* as their sib names. All these mean 'Pig'. But a few of those who have *Kālaharin* as their sib sometimes identify their sib as *Suar* etc. also. The same has also happened in the cases of *Kīnduār* and '*Shoṛ*' (meaning a kind of fish), *Laban* and *Nun* (salt), *Kāk* and *Kāuyā* (crow) and so on. These may be local adaptations due to the effect of migration and contact.

2. FAMILY

The "Family" among the Orāons of the Sunderban area forms a domestic unit and is patriarchal in nature. In this area, monogamous type of family is the societal profile, with one man and one wife, though occasionally one may encounter a polygynous type of family, wherein one man has more than one wife, but one would never find a polyandrous type of family, with more than one man simultaneously married to the same woman.

Usually, the eldest among the male members of the senior generation in a family is regarded as the head of the family and is known as *Kartā* of the family who exerts unquestioned authority over all others in the family. In all affairs, concerning the family, domestic, economic, social and religious, he represents the family and is the director, adviser and guide

TABLE IX
SIB-NAMES

Orāons of Sunderban (1959-60 & 1962)	Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur (Dalton: 1872)	Orāons of Chotā- Nāgpur (Risley: 1898)	Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur (S. C. Roy: 1915)	Orāons of Ranchi (1959)	Orāons of Tea gar- dens of North- East India (1924 and 1962)
I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Bāndrā (monkey)	Barar (Ficus indicus)	Amri (rice soup)	Aind (a sub- division of Eel)	Bākhā (grass)	Amri
Bākhā (grass)	Khhar	Bagh (tiger)	Addo (ox)	Bara (a kind of tree)	Bagh
Bāro (wildcat)	(tortoise)	Bandh	Angal Toppo	Bārlā (do)	Bando
Bārlā (banian tree)	Kispotas	Bando, (a wild cat which barks at night)	(A kind of bush)	Betikā (un- identified)	Bar
Benji (mongoose)	(stomach of the pig)	Bakula (paddy bird)	Alla (dog)	Chidrā (squir- rel)	Barwa
Dhānwar (paddy)	Gedhiar	Bar; (ficas Indica)	Amri (rice-soup)	Chiglo (Jackal)	Bhakla
Indoor (rat)	(Kite)	Barwa, (a wild dog)	Bando (wild cat)	Ekkā (tortoise)	Bhek or Bek
Kāk (crow)	Kujrar (a kind of tree)	Basa (a tree)	Barwa (wild dog)	Ergo (rat)	Bara
Kāuyā (crow)	Khakhhar (crow)	Bekh (salt)	Bakula (paddy bird)	Gourā (un- identified)	Minj
Karkat (crab)	Kerkeṭar (a kind of bird)	Beanh (a large fish with thorns on its back)	Beah (a large Minj identified)	Chirra	Chigah
Katās (wildcat)	Lakrar (tiger)	Chigah, (a jackal)		Hāroh (un- identified)	Chotto-
Kerkettā (sparrow)		Chirra (a squirrel)			
Khayā (hare)					
Khajar (catechu)					
Kāchūā (tortoise)					

I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Khākhō	Minjar (eel)	Chouria Musa, (field rat)	fish with thorns	Indur (a kind	Dhan
(a kind of fish)		Dhan (rice soup forbidden)	on the back)	of rat)	Dhechua
Kisputtā (Pigs		Dhechu (kingcrow)	Bakhla (a spe-	Kiss (Pig)	Dira
entrails)		Dirra (a kind of eel)	cies of grass)	Khākhā (raven)	Ekka
Kiss (Pig)		Dom Khakha (a raven)	Bara or Bar	Kerkettā (spar-	Eggo
Kujur (a kind of fruit)		Ekka (tortoise)	(Ficus indica)	row)	Gari
Kāloharin (Pig)		Ergo (a rat)	Basa (a kind of	Khākhō (a	Garwe
Kinduār (a kind of fish)		Gari (monkey)	tree)	kind of fish)	Gidhi
Khut (unidentified)		Garwe (a stork)	Bandh (an	Kujur (a kind	Gislihi
Lākrā (tiger)		Gede (a sluck)	embanked	of fruit)	Godo
Laban (Salt)		Gidhi (a vulture)	reservoir of	Kisputtā (Pig's	Golaiya
Minj (a kind of fish)		Gislihi (a bird)	water)	entrails)	Howra
Mujniār (a kind		Godo (crocodile)	Bekh (Salt)	Lākrā (tiger)	Induar
of creeper)		Golaia	Chidra (squir-	Minj (a kind	Kachua
Musā (mouse)		Gobdrari (a tree)	rel)	of fish)	Kaith
Nirā (squirrel)		Induar (a kind of eel)	Chiglo (Jackal)	Musā (mouse)	Kana
Nāg (snake)		Kachua (tortoise)	Dhechua (a	Osgā (field rat)	Kendi
Nun (salt)		Kalith (curry vegetable)	small black bird	Sāl (a kind of	Kenu
Nunuār (unidentified)			with a long tail)	fish)	Keond
Sāl (a kind of fish)			Ergo (rat)	Tiggā (un-	
Sāp (snake)			Ekka (tortoise)	identified)	
Shiāl (jackal)				Tirki (mice)	
Shol (a kind of fish)				Toppo (a kind	
Suār (Pig)				of bird)	
Tirki (mice)					

I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Toppo (a kind of bird)	Kanda (sweet potato)	Gari (common moth-key)	Kerketta		
Tigga (unidentified)	Kaua (crow)	Garwa (stork)	Khalkhoa		
	Kendi (a tree)	Gede (duck)	Khas		
	Kenu (a fish)	Gidhi (vulture)	Khetta		
	Keons (a fruit)	Gislihi (a species of bird)	Khospa		
	Kerketa (a bird which makes a noise like "Ket Ket")	Godo (crocodile)	Khira		
	Khalkhoa (cannot eat fish caught by a line out of a tank or pool).	Gonduari (a kind of tree)	Kinjur		
	Khaksa, (curry vegetable)	Halman (bamboo)	Lakra		
	Kh'es (cannot eat plants that grow in ponds.)	Jubbi (a marsh of surface spring)	Lila		
	Khetta, (a cobra)	Khoea (wild dog)	Lohar		
	Kheopa (a wild dog)	Kiss or Suar (Pig)	Minj		
	Kinda (a date palm)	Khakha (raven)	Nag		
	Kispotta (pig entrails).	Kerketta (hedge sparrow)	Nagbang		
		Kokro (cock)	Pusra		
		Kosuar (a species of fish)	Putri		
		Ken (do)	Rori		
			Runda		
			Sarno		
			Tirki		
			Tiga		
			Tir (Kuar)		
			Tirtia		

I	II	III	IV	V	VI
		Kosuar, (a kind of fish)	Khalkho (do)		Tiru
		Kusur (a fruit used to stain the horns of cattle at the Soharai festival)	Kinduar (do)		Topoar
		Kundri, (curry vegetable)	Kanda (sweet potato)		Toppo
		Kusuwa (a fish)	Kaithi (a curry vegetable)		Tete
		Lakra (a hyena)	Kendi (a kind of tree)		
		Lila (a kind of fish)	Kesh (paddy)		
		Lina (an ell)	Kinda (date palm)		
		Loha (iron)	Kujur (a kind of fruit)		
		Mahaṭo (a title)	Kundri (a curry vegetable)		
		Minji (a kind of eel)	Kispotta (pig's entrails)		
		Munjiniar (a wild creeper)	Khetra or Nag (cobra)		
		Murga (cock)	Lakra (tiger)		
		Nagbans (cobra)	Linda (subdivision of the Eel)		
		Otgonra (a hawk.)	Lita (a species of fish)		
		Pusra, (fruit of Kusum tree)	Minj (do)		
			Madgi (the mohua tree)		

Putri (a tree)	Munjniar (a kind of creeper)
Rori (a fruit of tree)	Osga (field rat)
Runda (a fox)	Orgora (hawk)
Sal (fish)	Pusra (a kind of
Sarno	Kusum tree)
Suar (hog)	Panna (iron)
Tig Hanuman (monkey)	Putri (a kind of tree)
Tirki (young mice)	Runda (fox)
Tirkuar (fruit)	Rori (a kind of tree)
Tirita	Sal (a species of fish)
Tirua (a kind of fish)	Tig (a species of monkey)
Topoar (a bird with a long tail, and body mottled black and white)	Tirki (young mice)
	Tirkuar (the Tithiocharai bird)
	Toppo or Lang-
	Toppo (a species of long-tailed bird)
	Tiru (a speices of fish)

of all the members of the family. All the members of the family, in their turn, offer him implicit obedience and reverence. He is responsible for the smooth running of the family, management of the family affairs, and allotment of specific duties and responsibilities to individual members in consultation with other elderly relatives. All the members of the family generally co-operate with each other in different socio-economic activities. If there is any scandal in the family or at the time of marriage of a son or daughter, he first consults with the elderly members of the family, then with other relatives and elderly neighbours and finally with the village or community Panchayet.

When the head of the family becomes too old or infirm or incapable of performing family functions properly, the place is taken over by the next senior male member of the family as the working head. But still the retired head of the family is respected by all in the family, and his advice is sought and respected by the working head and other members in different difficult situations.

(A) FAMILY TYPE:

From the nature of composition of family members of the Orāons of Sunderban, five types of families may be categorized, considering the number of members using the same kitchen and having their economic relations.

Type:— I This type of family consists of a married couple with its unmarried children or married couple having no children. Sometimes a divorced woman or a widow is married to a widower or a divorced man with his/her unmarried children of previous union, or a widower or a divorced man is married to an unmarried woman. This type of family may be termed as nuclear, simple or independent type of family.

Type:— II Next type is composed of a married couple

and their unmarried children together with the parent or parents of the man.

Type:— III Next comes the joint or extended type of family which consists of several married brothers with their spouses and children as well as parents and unmarried siblings, also married son or sons with their wives and children as well as their unmarried sons.

Type:— IV Polygynous type of family among them consists of a man with more than one wife, unmarried children and married sons and their spouses, and children, unmarried siblings, parents, or widowed parent.

Type:— V This is the last type of family consisting of widowed or divorced daughters living with their children and/or with their parents and/or with different adhesions related through husband's or wife's side living with Type I or Type II families.

The distribution of the above-mentioned types of families with percentage among the Orāons of Boyarmari village of Sandeshkhali police station is given below, and this may be taken as the representative picture of the whole of the Sunderban area.

TABLE X

Types of families				
Total Families	I	II	III	IV
108	37	15	49	3
Percentage	34.26	13.89	45.37	2.78

Table X shows that the extended or joint type of family (Type III) has the highest frequency with 49 families to its credit forming 45.37% of the total of 108 Orāon families. Next in order comes the simple or nuclear type of family (Type I) having 37 (34.26%) to its credit. The next type of

family (Type II) is 15 (13.89%) in number. The incidence of occurrence of other types of families is quite insignificant.

Thus, the Orāon family pattern of Sunderban may be termed as heterogeneous patrilineal type where the daughters leave their parents' house after marriage, and the sons bring wives from other villages, families and clans. Due to having patrilocal marital residence, the sons after marriage generally live with the father. It is also sometimes seen that the sons after marriage start living in a separate house (separated from the father) during the latter's life-time, and this type of marital residence is known as Neolocal. Adoption among them is very rare. The rich Orāons often keep the poor Orāon boys as servants (*Mahindars*).

A typical Orāon family on an average consists of five to six members which go below upto two persons in a simple or broken family or rise up to twelve or fourteen persons in a joint family.

The joint family of the Orāons of the Sunderban area resembles the traditional Hindu joint family in general. So far as division of labour is concerned, it shows a well-knit organisation. The *Kartā* of a household always looks after the prosperity of the family, and also thinks about the preservation of family sanctity. He controls and organises the members of the family, so that, their active co-operation may always be available. He is responsible for the distribution and supervision of the work of the members of the family. The earning members of the family look after the welfare of their aged, sick, unemployed and the handicapped kins living in the same joint family. Though the members of the joint or extended type of family have common share on food, worship and estate, still the *Kartā* is the sole owner of and has authority over the family property. The Orāon members belonging to this type of family, always try to obey the customary rules and regulations, and try their level best to make the family a joint corporate and harmonious functional unit. In this type of family sometimes it is seen that the married sons or brothers are living separately in separate huts, but have the same kitchen. This is done mainly

to avoid shortage of space in a single hut (if the members are large in number in such type of family), but this in no way hampers the basic functional characteristics of a joint and united Orāon household.

(B) BREAK-UP OF FAMILY

Family unit is usually not a stable one. It is often seen changing in size and type. It changes from grand-father's (father's father) generation to father's generation or from father's generation to ego's generation. This is mainly due to various internal and/or external forces; sometimes socio-economic factors bringing about the change or sometimes by psychological factors.

The nature of family composition, prior to the marriage of a son or daughter, may change after their marriage; and so also before or after the death of the head of the family or of father. It is also seen that the son, after marriage or on getting a job, may leave his father's house and start a new household. The following are a few of the main causes responsible for the break-up of a family.

- (1) Quarrel among the family members.
- (2) Death of father or head of the family.
- (3) Unwillingness to work in a co-operative way.
- (4) Migration.
- (5) Other causes like disparity in income, immorality, lack of obedience to elders etc.

Table—XI gives the frequency of different causes responsible for the family break-up among the Orāons of Sunderban (The data relate to the Orāons of Boyarmāri village).

TABLE XI

Quarrel among the family members %	Death of father/head of the family %	Unwillingness to work in a co-operative way %	Migration %	Other Causes %	Total %
26.66	25.00	11.67	16.67	20.00	100%

From Table XI it is evident that in 26.66% cases (being the highest) families break up due to the quarrel among family members. Another important factor responsible for the family break-up, is the death of father or the head of the family (25%). With the sudden withdrawal of the commanding authority on the death of the head of the family, disintegration may set in on account of disagreement and quarrel among the survivors. Migration (16.67%), unwillingness to work co-operatively (11.67%) and other miscellaneous causes (20%) are a few other causes worth mentioning for the family break up.

The typological structure and functioning of the Orāon families of the Sunderban area which have been discussed above, are not quite something new for the Orāons of this area alone. This type of family structure and functioning is also the characteristic of the neighbouring castes and communities living around the Orāons of Sunderban. This is also true in the case of the present day Ranchi Orāons.

The causes of break-up of a family as are found among the Orāons of Sunderban, may also be taken as the same for the Orāons of the Ranchi area as also for the neighbouring castes and communities of the Sunderban area around them.

3. KINSHIP SYSTEM

The members of the Orāon society of Sunderban are tied together in groups by various types of bond of which the linear descent and marriage ties are important. The types of relationship, thus built up, are as follows :—

- i. Consanguineal—one between parents, children, and succeeding generations, and
- ii. Affinial relationship between spouses and their relatives on either side.

In order to get a vivid picture of the present-day profile of the Orāon society of the Sunderban area, the system of social relationship, terms of relationship, the rights, duties, obligations, functions and prohibitions concerning different relations, have been studied.

(A) TERMINOLOGIES :

Kinship terminologies of the Orāons of Sunderban may be divided mainly into two systems :— (i) Classificatory and (ii) Denotative. In addition, a third one, arises due to the admixture of the above two types, which may be termed as a mixed type for the purpose. In connection with the kinship-system of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, Roy says, "The Orāon system of kinship is of the kind termed 'classificatory' by Morgan, and more appropriately called clan system by Dr. W. H. R. Rivers. The fundamental feature of this system is, broadly speaking, the applications of the same kinship-term in addressing most, though not all, persons of the same generation and sex" (1915 : 345).

It is worth mentioning that the classificatory system is regarded as the traditional norm of the Orāon society and the Denotative terms, that are now found, may be due to the adoption of the terms from the neighbouring castes and communities by the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

Table XII gives in detail the kinship terms of the Orāons of the Sunderban area, of those of the Chotā-Nāgpur area (Roy : 1915 : 346-350) and the terms used by some of the local Hindu castes and communities of Sunderban. This will give an idea about the kinship terms used by the Orāons of different areas, the change brought in due to different types of ethnic environment and the adoption of the terms (due to migration and contact) from the local Bengalee castes and communities.

From Table XII a distinct change in the kinship terminologies can be noticed between the Orāons of two different areas [(i) the flood-ridden area of the estuarine West Bengal where the immigrant groups inhabit and (ii) the undulated plateau of Chotā-Nāgpur where the autochthones live]. Excepting a few, almost all the terms of relationship of the Orāons of the former area are quite different from those of the latter area. On the other hand, the terminologies used by the Orāons of the Sunderban area are quite similar in most of

TABLE XII

Terms in English	Terms in Bengali (used by some of the Hindu castes in Sunderban)	Terms used by the Orāons of the Sunderban area	Terms used by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur (Roy 1915)
1	2	3	4
1. Father's father's father	Kartābābā/Jethā- bābā/Barabābā	Jethā or Jethā- masāi	Eng baṛās
2. Father's father's mother	Kartāmā/Baromā	Jethimā	Eng baṛi
3. Mother's mother's father	Kartābābā/ Jethābābā	Jethamasāi	Eng baṛās
4. Mother's mother's mother	Kartāmā/Baramā	Jethimā	Eng baṛi
5. Father's father	Thākurdādā	Thākurdādā/ Thākurbābā	Eng ājjos
6. Father's father's elder brother	Thākurdādā	Thākurdādā/ Thākurbābā	Eng ājjos
7. Father's father's younger brother	Thākurdādā	Thākurdādā/ Thākurbābā	Eng ājjos
8. Father's mother	Thākurididi	Thākurididi	Eng ajji
9. Mother's father	Dādu/Dādā	Nānā	Eng ājjos or eng nānās
10. Mother's mother	Didima/Didā	Nāni	Eng ajji or Eng nani
11. Father	Bābā	Bābā/Bāp/	Embās
12. Father's elder brother	Jethā/or Jethā- mosāi	Bārā/Jethā/ Jethāmasai	Eng baṛās or kohā embās
13. Father's younger brother	Kākā	Kākā	Eng Kākās or sānni embās
14. Father's elder brother's wife	Jethimā/Jethi	Bāri/Jethimā	Eng bāṛi
15. Father's younger brother's wife	Kāki	Kāki	Eng kākki
16. Father's sister	Pishi/Pishimā	Phuphu	Eng tāchi
17. Father's sister's husband	Pishāmosāi	Phuphā	Eng māmūs
18. Mother	Mā	Māi	Ingio
19. Mother's elder brother	Bara Māmā	Bara Māmā	Eng māmūs

1	2	3	4
20. Mother's younger brother	Choto Māmā	Chota Māmā	Eng māmus
21. Mother's brother's wife	Māmi/Māmimā	Māmi	Eng tāchi
22. Mother's elder sister	Baro Māsi/ Bara Māsimā	Jethi/Bāri	Eng bāri
23. Mother's elder sister's husband	Baro Mesomasāi	Bārā/Jethā- masāi/Jethā	Eng barās
24. Mother's younger sister	Māsi/Māsimā	Musi	Eng tāchi
25. Mother's younger sister's husband	Meso/Mesomasāi	Musā/Mūshā	Eng mosā
26. Husband's father	Sasur	Sasur	Eng Sasrus
27. Husband's mother	Sāsuri	Sās	Eng sās
28. Wife's father	Sasur	Sasur	Eng Sasrus
29. Wife's mother	Sāsuri	Sās	Eng sās
30. Husband's mother's brother	Māmāsasur	Māmāsasur	Eng māmū. sasrus
31. Wife's mother's brother	Māmāsasur	Māmāsasur	Eng māmū sasrus
32. Elder brother	Dādā	Dādā	Eng dādās.
33. Wife's elder brother	Samandhi/Sālā	Dādā/Samandhi	Eng jeth sārās
34. Wife's elder sister's husband	Bhāirābhāi	Bhāirābhāi	Eng sarhus
35. Husband's elder brother	Bhāsūr	Bhāsūr	Eng bāinālas
36. Elder sister	Didi	Didi	Eng dai
37. Wife's elder sister	Barosāli	Jeth Sās	Eng bāināli
38. Husband's elder sister	Didi/Nanad	Didi	Eng bāināli
39. Husband's elder brother's wife	Didi	Buthni/Didi	Eng gotni
40. Son's wife's father	Beyāi	Sāndi	Eng Samdhis.
41. Son's wife's mother	Beyāin	Sāmdo	Samdo
42. Daughter's husband	Jāmāi	Dāmād	Eng Jaun- khaddis
43. Daughter's husband's father	Beyāi	Samdi	Eng samdis
44. Younger Brother	Bhāi	Bhāi	Ingris
45. Wife's younger brother	Sālā	Sarā	Eng Saras

1	2	3	4
46. Son	Chele/Betā	Chouyā	Engdas
47. Younger brother's son	Chele/Betā	Chouyā	Eng barabetās
48. Elder brother's son	Chele/Betā	Chouyā	Eng khlagos
49. Husband's elder brother's son	Chele/Betā	Chouyā	Eng khlagos
50. Husband's younger brother	Deor	Deor	Eng erkhos
51. Brother's son (W.S.)	Bhāipo	Phuphā betā	Eng achos
52. Elder sister's son (W.S.)	Bonpo	Musibetā	mosi betā
53. Younger sister's son (W.S.)	Bonpo	Musibetā	bara betā
54. Wife's elder sister's son	Sālibetā	Jethibetā	mosi betā
55. Wife's younger sister's son	Sālibetā	Musibetā	bara betā
56. Wife's younger sister's husband	Bhāirābhāi	Bhāirābhāi	Eng sarhus
57. Sister's daughter's husband	Bhāgniāmāi	Bhāgniāmāi	Eng jaun-khāddis
58. Elder sister's husband	Bhagnipati	Bohanāi	Eng Bhetās
59. Wife's brother's son	Samindhīrbetā	Somandhi/ Chouyā/betā	Eng bhagnās
60. Husband sister's son	Bhāgnā	Bhāgnā	Eng bhagnās
61. Daughter	Beye/beti	Beti/Bitti	Engdā
62. Younger sister	Bon	Bahin	Ingri
63. Husband's younger brother's wife	Bon	Bahin	Eng gotni
64. Husband's younger sister	Nanad	Nanad	Engerkho
65. Elder brother's daughter (m.s.)	Bhāijhi	Māiyā	Enkhlagi
66. Husband's elder brother's daughter	Bhāsūrijhi	Māiyā	Enkhlagi
67. Wife's brother's daughter	Samandhirbetā	Samandhirbiti	Eng bhāgni
68. Husband's sister's daughter	Bhāgni	Bhāgni	Eng bhāgni

1	2	3	4
69. Wife's elder sister's daughter	Sālibeti	Māiyā	mosi beti
70. Wife's younger sister's daughter	Sālibeti	Māiyā	baṛi beti
71. Younger sister's daughter (w.s.)	Bonjhi	Māiyā	baṛi beti
72. Younger brother's daughter (m.s.)	Bhāijhi	Māiyā	baṛi beti
73. Husband's younger brother's daughter	Bhāijhi	Māiyā	baṛi beti
74. Brother's daughter	Bhāijhi	Māiyā	Eng ācho
75. Sons' son	Nāti	Nāti	Eng nāttis
76. Sons' daughter	Nātni	Nātni	Eng nāttis
77. Mother's brother's daughter	Bon	Bahin	Nil
78. Mother's brother's son	Bhāi/Dādā	Bhāi/Dādā	Nil
79. Husband	Swāmi	Swami	Eng metas
80. Wife	Stree	Jāni	Eng khai
81. Sons's wife	Boumā/Bou	Boumā/Bou	Eng kheṛo
82. Brother's son's wife	Boumā/Bou	Boumā/Bou	Eng kheṛo
83. Sister's son's wife	Boumā/Bou	Boumā/Bou	Eng kheṛo
84. Younger brother's wife	Bhāibou	Bhai putou	Eng bainali
85. Elder brother's wife (m.s.)	Boudi	Bhoujhi/Boudi	Nasgo
86. Father sister's son	Bhāi	Bhāi	Nil
87. Father's sister's daughter	Bon	Bahin	Nil
88. Widow	Bidhabā	Rār betichuā	Nil
89. Widower	Bipatnik	Dār betāchuā	Nil
90. Adopted son	Poshyoputra	Bālpos, Pusputra	Nil

the cases to those of the neighbouring castes and communities. This change in the kinship nomenclatures is due to the contact with the neighbouring communities in the new area for a long period. The Orāons of Sunderban are sur-

rounded by different Hindu castes (such as Bāgdi, Māhishya, Kaibarta, Pod, Bostom etc.) and the Muslims. These castes and communities have exerted their influence to a varied degree on the life of the Orāons for years which can easily be visualised from the kinship terminology used by them. The terms *Bābā* (father), *Kākā* (father's younger brother), *Jethā* (father's elder brother and others), *Thākurdādā* (Father's father and his brothers), *Kāki* (Father's younger brother's wife), *Māmi* (Mother's brother's wife) etc. used for the respective relatives have definitely been borrowed from Bengali kinship terminology which are used by the local Hindu castes as revealed from the Table. Again the terms *Phupā* (father's sister's husband), *Phuphu* (Father's sister), *Nānā* (Mother's father) and *Nāni* (Mother's mother) used by the Orāons of this area are quite similar to the terms used by the Muslims. In this connection, it may be stated here that there are a number of tribal groups in India who use these terms now-a-days for their respective relatives and this is mainly due to local influence.

Further, it may be pointed out here, that the change has also taken place in the terms of relationship of the Orāons of the Ranchi area, but this change of terms has occurred on account of local ethnic environment of the Ranchi area.

(B) ANALYTICAL STUDY OF KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

The paragraphs below deal with an analysis of the kinship terms used by the Orāons of lower Bengal with regard to their application. For convenience, the following abbreviations have been used:—

Father—Fa

Mother—Mo

Son—So

Daughter—Da

Brother—Br

Sister—Si

Husband—Hu

Wife—Wi

Elder—El

Younger—Yo

(i) *The Classificatory Kinship Terminology :*

In Orāon terminology of kinship in Sunderban, the superabundance of classificatory terms may be noticed, though a few denotative terms may also be found.

An Orāon calls his FaFa, FaFaYoBr and FaFaElBr as *Thākurdādā* or *Thākurbābā*.

The FaFaFa, MoMoFa, MoElSiHu and FaElBr are termed as *Jethā* or *Jethāmasāi*. For the last two terms *Bārā* is also used. In this case, it is seen that the members of the first and the third generations of both paternal and maternal lineages of the Ego are given the same term. On an enquiry about the same from the informants, it has been found that MoElSi is considered as *Bara-Mā* (elder than mother) which stands at par with the MoMoMo, and as such Hu of MoElSi is also respected in the same way as MoMoFa or FaFaFa, and hence due to this all of them (FaFaFa, MoMoFa, FaElBr and MoElSiHu) are referred to by a single term *Jethā* or *Jethāmasāi*.

In the same way, FaElBrWi, MoElSi, MoMoMo and FaFaMo are denoted by the term *Jethimā*. Here also the members of the first and the third generations of both paternal and maternal lineages of the Ego are called by the same term. The reason behind it is also similar to the previous one i.e. due to respect. But only for the first two relatives (FaElBrWi and MoElSi) both the terms *Jethimā* and *Bārī* are used.

The SoWiMo and DaHuMo are both termed as *Sāmdo*, and SoWiFa and DaHuFa as *Sāmdi*.

Musibetā is the common term used for ElSiSo, YoSiSo, and WiYoSiSo whereas WiElSiSo is known as *Jethibetā* which is a descriptive or denotative term.

Boumā refers to SoWi, BrSoWi and SiSoWi.

The term *Māiyā* means daughter. It is used in cases of the daughters of the ElBr, HuElBr, WiElSi, WiYoSi, YoSi, YoBr and HuYoBr.

The mothers of both husband and wife are known as *Sās*, but she is generally addressed as *Māi* which is the term used in the case of mother also. The fathers of both husband and wife are known as *Sasur* but often termed as *Bābā*, which is also used for father.

The MoBr of both husband and wife are termed as *Māmāsasur*.

Though the ElSi is termed as *Didi*, YoSi as *Bahin* and WiYoSi as *Sāli*, still the son of all of them are termed as *Musibetā*.

The So, YoBrSo, ElBrSo, HuElBrSo are termed as *Chouyā*.
(ii) *Denotative terms* :

Though the influence of the classificatory terms in the Orāon nomenclature (of Sunderban and also of Ranchi areas) may be markedly seen, yet, due to the influence of the local castes and communities, they have developed some denotative terms. The following are a few denotative terms used by the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

Father—*Bābā*

Mother—*Māi*

Husband—*Swāmi*

Wife—*Jāni*

Father's younger brother—*Kākā*

Father's younger brother's wife—*Kāki*

Mother's younger sister—*Musi*

Mother's younger sister's husband—*Musā*

Husband's elder brother—*Bhāsur*

Husband's elder brother's wife—*Buthni*

Wife's younger brother—*Sārā*

Wife's elder sister—*Jethsās*

Husband's younger brother—*Deor*

Wife's elder sister's son—*Jelhibetā*

Mother's father—*Nānā*

Mother's Brother—*Māmā*

Younger brother's wife—*Bhāi Putou*

Elder brother's wife—*Bhowjhi*

Father's sister—*Phuphu*

Father's sister's husband—*Phuphā*

Besides these there are a few terminologies such as *Betā* (son), *Beti* (daughter), *Bahin* (younger sister), *Dādā* (elder brother), *Māmā* (maternal uncle), *Phuphu* (father's sister), *Phuphā* (father's sister's husband) etc. each of which relates to a number of persons though each of them denotes a particular relation. When these are often added by using *Baro* (eldest), *Mejo* (next to eldest), *Choto* (youngest) etc. each indicates one's exact position in the line of relation with him, such as *Bara Beti* (eldest daughter), *Mejo Beti* daughter next to the eldest), *Choto Beti* (youngest daughter), *Bara Phuphā* (Father's eldest sister's husband), *Choto Phuphā* (Father's younger sister's husband) and so on.

Widow and widower are termed as *Rārbetichuā* and *Rārbetāchuyā* respectively. The adopted son is known as *Bālpos* or *Pusputra*. The child of a widowed person is known as *Hātāni* (*Betā* or *maiya*).

(C) GENERAL RULES OF THE KINSHIP NOMENCLATURE:

The kinship terminology of the Orāons of Sunderban follows some traditional or conventional rules. In discussing these rules regarding the formation of different categories of terms of relationship, we have shown while describing classificatory system how a number of kinsmen are grouped together under a single term. Now, we would like to deal with the ways by which kins are clustered into different groups under distinctive name following Radcliffe-Brown's³². *Sociological Laws*.

(I) Sex Differentiation

The criterion of sex in the kinship terminology of the Orāons is followed by them like other societies. In this respect the influence of Bengali terminology of the neighbouring castes and communities cannot be ignored.

The term *Māmā* denotes MoBr whereas the term *Māmi* indicates MoBrWi. The term *Kākā* means FaYoBr and *Kāki* means FaYoBrWi. These terms are also used by the neighbouring castes and communities. The term *Nānā* is used for MoFa and *Nāni* for MoMo. In the same way MoYoSi is *Musi* and MoYoSiHu is *Musā*, FaElBr is *Bara* or *Jethā* and FaElBrWi

is *Bāri* or *Jethi*, *Hu* is *Swāmi* and *Wi* is *Jāni*, *FaSiHu* is *Phuphā* and *FaSi* is *Phuphu* and so on.

(II) Generation Differentiation

In the terminology of the *Sunderban Orāons*, the presence of different terms for the members of different generations may be noticed (with a few exceptions). The term *Thākurdādā* or *Thākurbābā* indicates *FaFa*, *FaFaYoBr* and *FaFaElBr*, all of whom belong to the same generation; and this term is not applied to any other members of any generation.

Similarly, in the second descending generation, there are two terms *Nāṭi* and *Nātni* meaning *SoSo/DaSo* and *SoDa/DaDa* respectively. In the third ascending generation, *FaFaFa* and *MoMoFa* are called by the term *Jethā* or *Jethāmasāi*, and *MoMoMo* and *FaFaMo* by *Jethimā*. Though these terms are peculiar to these two generations, still there are a few exceptions (such as *MoElSiHu* in the former case, and *MoElSi* and *FaElBrWi* in the latter case bear respective terms), the reasons for which have been discussed earlier.

(III) Age Differentiation

The age differentiation, referring either to the age of the Ego, or to that of the linked relative, has got much value in the kinship nomenclature of the *Orāons* of southern part of West Bengal. It is often seen that the difference of age has been marked by the same particular terms such as *Bārā* (eldest), *Mejo* (next in order to the eldest), *Sejo* (next to *Mejo*), *Choto* (youngest) and so on. By using these terms, the seniority or juniority of a particular relative is denoted. Thus, where *Phuphā* means *FaSiHu*, *Bara Phuphā* means *FaElSiHu*, *Mejo Phuphā* means the husband of the second sister in the descending order of father, *Choto Phuphā* means *FaYoSiHu* etc. In the same way *Bara Beti* means eldest daughter, *Choto-Beti* youngest daughter. Again there are some specific terms which indicate particular relations in order of position, such as *FaElBr* is *Jethā* but *FaYoBr* is *Kākā*. *FaElBrWi* is *Jethi* or *Bāri*, *FaYoBrWi* is *Kāki*. *MoElSi* is *Jethi* or *Bāri* and *MoElSiHu* is

Jethāmasāi, whereas MoYoSi is *Mushi* and MoYoSiHu is *Musā*. The elder brother of the Ego is *Dādā* whereas younger brother is *Bhāi*. Again to the wife of Ego, her HuElBr is *Bhāsur* but HuYoBr is *Deor* etc.

Thus, from the above discussions, one can see that the terminology of the Orāons of the Sunderban area, besides other rules and factors, is also built up following the rule of age differentiation.

(IV) *Collaterality*

In the first ascending generation, a distinction can be made between lineal relatives (parents) and collateral relatives (classificatory brothers of the father and classificatory sisters of the mother).

(V) *Intimacy of Relationship*

The Orāons distinguish the relatives by the degree of their nearness and intimacy. The relatives are generally known as *Āpan* whereas non-relatives as *Birān* or *Par*. Again among the relatives, two distinct groups are recognised (i) *Nikat Kutum* or *Ātmiya* (near relatives) and (ii) *Dur Kutum* (relatives of remoter degrees). One's own younger brother is *Bhāi* but a non-related boy of the same age as that of the brother may be referred to as *Bhāi-er-moto* (like own brother).

(VI) *The Dichotomy of Consanguineal and Affinial Relations*

Previously, it has been seen that different relatives have been given a single term (by classificatory system), but in this para special mention has been made to show the contrast between the consanguineal and affinial kins. This contrast is marked among the Orāon of the Sunderban area. The term *Jelhimā*, which means basically FaElBrWi is extended to indicate MoElSi, MoMoMo and FaFaMo, but among the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons, a common term *Eng bari* is in use for all these relatives. The term *Māiyā* and *Betā* or *Chele* also denote and include several consanguineal and affinial relations.

(D) CORE KINSHIP TERMS:

In the foregoing discussions, we have classified the different groups of kinship terms. Now, in the forthcoming discussions, we have tried to define the core kinship terms through sex, generation, sib, age, seneority, parenthood and such other ways. For these, the following abbreviations have been used:—

S! — Feminine.

Sm — Masculine.

G + 3 — Third ascending generation.

G + 2 — Second ascending generation.

G + 1 — First ascending generation.

GO — Ego's generation.

G — 1 — First descending generation.

G — 2 — Second descending generation.

Ae — Elder.

Ay — Younger.

Cl — Own sib.

Co — Different sib.

Co-Cl — Own or different sib.

Pp — Parent, a lineal kinsmen.

Pn — Not a parent, a collateral kinsman.

Zm — Masculine speaker.

Zf — Feminine speaker.

Λ = More respectable and higher in status.

|| = Equal status.

≠ = Unequal status.

----- = Terms of address.

→ = Terms of relationship.

|| = Equal in status but unequal in position.

When for a particular relation these symbols are used, they give a formula like structure of that particular relation. For example, *SmG+1 AeCl Pn* means a man of Ego's parent's generation who is elder than the parent and who is a member of the Ego's own sib but is not his own parent. This indicates Father's elder brother. A list of these terms with definitions and examples is given in the following table.

TABLE XIII

Term	Definition	Examples
Thākurdādā	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 2\text{Cl}$	FaFa
Thākurbābā	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 2\text{AcCl}$	FaFaElBr
	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 2\text{AoCl}$	FaFaYoBr
Jethā/Jethāmasāi	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 3\text{Cl}$	FaFaFa
	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 3\text{Co/Cl}$	MoMoFa
	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 1\text{AcCo/ClPn}$	MoElSiHu
Bārā	$\leftarrow \text{SmG} + 1\text{AcClPn}$	FaElBr
Jethimā	$\rightarrow \text{SfG} + 3\text{Cl}$	FaFaMo
	$\rightarrow \text{SfG} + 3\text{Co/Cl}$	MoMoMo
	$\rightarrow \text{SfG} + 1\text{AcClPn}$	FaElBrWi
Bāri	$\leftarrow \text{SfG} + 1\text{AcCoPn}$	MoElSi
Thākurdidi	$\text{SfG} + 2\text{Cl}$	FaMo
Nānā	$\text{SmG} + 2\text{Co}$	MoFa
Nāni	$\text{SfG} + 2\text{Co/Cl}$	MoMo
Māi/Mā	$\text{SfG} + 1\text{ClPp}$	Mo
Bābā/Bāp	$\text{SmG} + 1\text{ClPp}$	Fa
Musi	$\text{SfG} + 1\text{AyCoPn}$	MoYoSi
Musā	$\text{SmG} + 1\text{AyCo/ClPn}$	MoYoSiHu
Sasur	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 1\text{Cl}$	HuFa
Bābā/Bāp	$\rightarrow \text{SmG} + 1\text{Co}$	WiFa
Sās	$\rightarrow \text{SfG} + 1\text{Cl}$	HuMo
Māi	$\rightarrow \text{SfG} + 1\text{Co}$	WiMo
Phuphu	$\text{SfG} + 1\text{Co}$	FaElSi
	$\text{SfG} + 1\text{Co/Cl}$	FaYoSi

Term	Definition	Example
Phuphā	SmG + 1Co	FaElSiHu, FaYoSiHu
Kākā	SmG + 1AyClPn	FaYoBr
Kāki	SfG + 1AyClPn	FaYoBrWi
Māmā	SmG + 1Co	MoElBr, MoYoBr
Māmi	SfG + 1Co	MoElBrWi, MoYoBrWi
Māmāsasur	SmG + 1Co	HuMoBr, WiMoBr
Dādā	SmGOAeCl	ElBr
Sammandhi	SmGOAeCo	WiElBr
Bhāsar	SmGOAeCl	HuElBr
Deor	SmGOAyCl	HuYoBr
Didi	SfGOAeCl	ElSi and HuElSi (before marriage), HuElBrWi
Jethsās	SfGOAeCo	ElSi and HuElSi (after marriage)
Swāmi	SfGOAeCo/Cl	WiElSi
Jāni	SmGOCofZf (before Marriage)	Hu, HuYoBr, ElSiHu (MS)
Bahin	Sm/SfGOCofCl (after Marriage)	Wi, WiYoSi, ElBrWi (WS)
Bhāi	SfGoCoZm (before marriage)	FaBrDa, HuYoSi and YoSi (before marriage) FaBrDa, HuYoSi and YoSi (after marriage)
	SfGOAyCl	
	SfGOAyCo	
	SfGOAyCo/Cl	FaSiDa, MoBrDa, MoSiDa YoBr, FaBrSo
	SmGOAyCl	
	SmGOAyCo	FaSiSo
	SmGOAyCo/Cl	MoSiSo, MoBrSo

Term	Definition	Example
Bhāirabhāi	SmGOAeCo/Cl	WiElSiHu
Buthni	SfGOAeCl	HuElBrWi
Sāmdi	SmGOC	SoWiFa, DaHuFa
Sāmdo	SfGOC	SoWiMo, DaHuMo
Boujhi/Boudi	SfGOAeCl	ElBrWi and also wives of the collateral brothers.
Bhāi putou	SfGOAyCl	YoBrWi and also wives of the same collateral brothers,
Sārā	SmGOAyCo	WiYoBr
Betā/Chhouyā	SmG - 1Cl	So, YoBrSo, ElBrSo, HuElBrSo, HuYoBrSo
Biti/Beti	SfG - 1Cl	Da (before marriage)
	 SfG - 1Co	Da (after marriage)
Māiyā	SfG - 1Cl	ElBrDa, HuElBrDa
	 SfG - 1Cl	YoBrDa, HuYoBrDa
	 SfG - 1Co	WiElBrDa, WiElSiDa
	 SfG - 1Co	ElSiDa
	 SfG - 1Co	WiYoBrDa, WiYoSiDa
	 SfG - 1Co	YoSiDa.
Phuphā betā	SmG - 1CoZf	BrSo(W.S.)
	 SmG - 1CoZf	ElSiSo (W.S.) YoSiSo (W.S.)
Musibetā	 SmG - 1Co	WiYoSiSo
	⌘ SmG - 1Co	WiElSiSo
Jethibetā	SmG - 1Co	DaHu
Dāmād	SmG - 1Co	SoWi
Boumā	SfG - 1Cl	SiSoWi, HuSiSoWi
Bhāgnā-bou	SfG - 1Co	SiSo, HuSiSo
Bhāgnā	SmG - 1Co	

Term	Definition	Example
Bhāgni	SfG - 1Co	SiDa, HuSiDa (before marriage)
	SfG - $\begin{smallmatrix} \\ 1Co/Cl \end{smallmatrix}$	SiDa, HuSiDa (after marriage)
Bhāgni Jāmāi	SmG - 1Co/Cl	SiDaHu, HuSiDaHu
Nāti	SmG - 2Cl	SoSo
	SmG - $\begin{smallmatrix} \\ 2Co \end{smallmatrix}$	DaSo
Nātin/Nātni	SfG - 2Cl	SoDa (unmarried)
	SfG - $\begin{smallmatrix} \\ 2Co \end{smallmatrix}$	SoDa (married), DaDa

(E) KINSHIP USAGES:

(I) *Marriage Regulations:*

Though the marriage in the Orāon society of the Sunderban area is regulated by the rule of sib exogamy, still kinship is none the less important. They do not like to get spouses (may be of different sibs) within the blood relationship upto three generations level. Roy also found the same marital rule governed by the kinship system among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur. Cross-cousin marriage, though present among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, as stated by Roy and other authors, is absent among the Orāons of Sunderban. Junior levirate (when an younger brother marries his elder brother's widow) and Junior sororate (when a man marries his deceased wife's younger sister) are practised in this society. Due to the rule of avoidance senior levirate (elder brother marrying younger brother's wife) and senior sororate (marriage between a man and his wife's elder sister) are prohibited. The brothers and sisters of the same parents, of the same mother but of different fathers, and of same father but of different mothers are not allowed to marry. The adopted child is also not allowed to marry the daughter of his adoptee parents or the daughters of his adoptee parents' collateral

brothers and sisters. Marriage within the near relatives is also prohibited among many local Hindu castes of the Sunderban area.

(II) *Avoidance (Jalchharā)*

The most widespread rule of avoidance present in the Orāon society of Sunderban is in between a man and his wife's elder sister, and that between a man and his younger brother's wife. The same rule of avoidance operates also between a woman and her younger sister's husband, and between a woman and her husband's elder brother. These rules of avoidance are ceremonially observed on and from the tenth day of marriage. On the tenth day, the elder brother and the younger brother's wife stand on the courtyard and in between them (on the ground) a brass cup containing a little rice-beer, water, a copper coin and a few leaves of *Tulsi* (Basil) is placed. The younger brother's wife lifts it and gives it on the husband's elder brother's hands without touching him. Then both of them utter the oath of avoidance. In case of a man and his wife's sister, the same ceremonial procedure is also observed. This ceremony cuts all the earthly relationships between them. From that day onward, they behave with each other as strangers. They are not allowed to touch each other or to call by name. The newly wed girl turns her face and covers it with the veil of her *sāri* when she happens to meet her husband's elder brother. They are also not permitted to sit on the same mat or sit together or stand side by side. Should one happen to touch by chance or even take the other's name under unavoidable circumstances, a ceremonial expiation has to be performed. Marriage and sexual affairs between them are strictly tabooed.

But, within the ten days after marriage (i.e. until the prohibitory ceremony is performed), these rules of avoidance are generally not observed for those days only.

Besides the above avoidances, a partial avoidance is

noticed in between a man and his son's wife. But no ceremony is performed in this case.

These types of avoidances are also present among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, and also among several castes and communities in the Sunderban area. Even among many higher castes there is a strict avoidance between a woman and her husband's elder brother (*Bhāsuri*).

(III) *Name Taboo:*

The name taboo is also noticed among the Orāons of Sunderban. In case of those relatives among whom the rule of avoidance persists, name-taboo is in existence there. Further, the wife of a man cannot utter the name of her husband, husband's mother and husband's father. The husband generally, does not utter the name of his deceased wife and his parents-in-laws. This type of taboo is still in existence among many castes and communities of southern and other parts of West Bengal.

(IV) *Joking Relationship:*

Joking relationships exist among different relatives in the Orāon society of the Deltaic Bengal. The grandfather is often seen to cut jokes with the young grand-daughters who in turn do the same. The same is found between grand-mother and grand-son. Such type of joking relationship also exists between the husband and his wife's younger sister. The wife of a man is often seen cutting jokes with her husband's younger brothers. In the latter two cases marriage is permissible. This type of joking relationship is not the characteristic of the Orāons only but is also present among other neighbouring castes and communities of the tract.

(V) *Teknonymy:*

Though to a man his wife is *Jāni*, often calls her the 'mother of his child' i.e. 'the mother of Gopāl' (his son), 'the

mother of Laksmi' (his daughter) etc. In the same way, a married woman refers to the neighbouring woman about her husband as 'the father of Gopāl' (her son), 'the father of Laksmi' (her daughter) etc. She also uses 'my husband' (*Hāmrā Swāmi*), but she cannot utter the name proper of her husband. The husband, sometimes, uses his wife's name. This is also the pattern with the neighbouring castes and communities around the Orāons of Sunderban.

(F) KINSHIP AND TRAINING:

Education is considered to include all social processes which help a human being to fit more adequately in his social environment. Besides the knowledge regarding various affairs of the external world, specific spheres in the training of a child include instructions in the manners and moral rules of the society, training in arts and crafts and important knowledge in traditional lore and ritual formula etc. In the above perspective, the Orāon society of Southern Bengal has been studied in order to find out the degree of relationship between training and kinship. In this connection it may be said that, by using the term *training* here, we not only include the school education but also training in the social norms, behaviours, traditions etc.

The parents of an Orāon society teach their children in social etiquettes, behaviours etc., and if the children break any of these rules of etiquettes etc., their parents are held responsible for the same. Discipline in the family, obedience to the authority of the father and of other elders are also considered by them as moral duty, and the parents train children from the very young age about their duties, obligations etc. in this respect. Small children generally get training from the mother. But sons when they are a bit grown up, come under the direct supervision of the father. He trains him in such a way as to be an Orāon in the true sense. During the ploughing season the father takes the son to the agricultural field and gives him theoretical as well as practical

training regarding agricultural activities etc. In the same way, the priest (*Pāhān*) or magician or medicine man (*Matī* or *Gunin*) and others give training to their sons in their respective hereditary professional speciality.

Again in some of the villages, where the headmanship (*Rāj* moral) of the village is hereditary, the eldest son often sits by the side of his father during session of the Panchayet, and thereby gets training. Sometimes, the father gives him chance to judge in order to test his efficiency.

On the other hand, when the daughter grows up her mother trains her in different domestic activities, so that she may become an ideal wife of the household. She teaches her the method of cooking, bringing of drinking water and fuel, cleaning and sweeping of the house, serving food to the family members, nursing the children and so on and so forth. A child learns about cleanliness of his/her person from early years from his/her mother, which enables him/her to perform this in the latter phase of his/her life. A grand-father may take great interest in a child's upbringing and may provide him/her with traditional lore, names of family ancestors and their history, tales of ancient culture and immigration, the actions of the spirits and the doings of the gods etc. It is not an unusual sight in the Sunderban area to find the grandsons or grand-daughters sitting on the lap of the grand-father or an aged person, hearing the story of the tigers and crocodiles, dacoits and marauders etc. (which infested the Sunderban area once upon a time), and the heroic struggle against these by their forefathers at the time of settling in this area. They also hear how the '*Gunin*' of their society used to keep the ferocious animals away from human habitat by dint of magical power. It is also seen that a grand-parent is often joking with the grown-up grand-children. The *Thākurdādā* jokingly asks his *Nātnī*, "will you marry me?" or the grand-mother asks her *Nāti*, "Won't you prefer a girl like me?" etc. Thus these young souls, in an indirect way, get the first scent of sex life from some of their nearest kins. The younger sisters of the Orāon society of the

Sunderban area learn about sex life from the elderly married sisters. In an Orāon household of this area, the worship of the family deity is generally done by the male head of the family. When he becomes too old or infirm to perform this, he voluntarily transmits the details of the rituals of the family deity, and more esoteric information concerning the religious life to the next eldest male member who succeeds to this post. Sometimes it is seen, that due to sudden death of the father, an Orāon becomes bewildered and often laments for his comparative ignorance of these rites and rituals, and is forced to depend on the priest or any other elderly relative (who knows these rituals in detail).

The grown-up sisters, and often brothers also, are seen playing with their younger brothers and sisters, and nursing them, and thus training them indirectly. In some cases, the young one accompany their elder brothers and sisters or other relatives in fishing in the ponds and ditches, or to collect dry branches and leaves or grass for fuel from here and there.

Thus, it is seen, that an individual in Orāon society gets training regarding the role to be played by him/her as a member of the society in different spheres of activities (such as social, economic, political, religious etc.) from the very childhood from immediate associates in the family, kin-group etc., and the kinship structure of the society is helpful in this respect to a considerable extent.

(G) CARE OF THE YOUNG CHILDREN:

From the very day of the birth, till a child becomes sufficiently grown up to stand on his own legs, it needs constant care and attention from elderly persons. As soon as a child is born in an Orāon family, a considerable change is noticed in the daily routine of work of the family members. After the performance of the different rituals connected with the birth, the mother takes over the sole charge of the child (though occasionally helped by her own and her husband's relatives). Though, it is true, that the mother has the greatest

responsibility to rear up the child in this society, still, often an Orāon mother cannot get sufficient time to devote her fullest attention to the baby on account of the pressure of household works and also of economic activities. This is somehow balanced by the brothers and the sisters of the child, who look after it occasionally. Sufficient care is taken for the health of the new born, so that it does not suffer from any diseases etc. Still due to poor economic condition and ignorance about health and sanitary rules, majority of the Orāon children suffer from under nourishment and various types of disease from their childhood, leading at times to untimely death. The new born is regarded as a delicate object by all the family members, and small children are not allowed to handle it for fear of causing damage. Strangers are also not allowed to touch or see the newborn babe for the fear of evil eyes.

Whenever a baby is crying, the mother tries to stop it by rocking and if it does not stop crying, she puts the infant to the breast, thinking that the crying was from hunger, not realizing that crying may also be due to indisposition and not from hunger. The mother takes the principal role of nursing the infant. In an Orāon joint family, other grown-up female relatives share the nursing duties with the mother. In the Orāon society of southern Bengal, little children are not allowed to go outside the house after dusk from the belief that the evil spirits may do harm to these weak souls, as at that hour evil spirits saunter about for doing mischief, particularly to youngsters. In a nuclear family of the Orāon society, if a mother falls ill, she requests her mother or sister or any other near female relatives to come over and stay for a few days to look after the child and household duties till she recovers. It is quite often seen in an Orāon village of this tract, that in the early morning the father is lulling the little infant to give relief to the wife.

During *hāt* day (local market day), the father or mother often carries the baby on the shoulder or on lap, and goes to the market. If the mother dies leaving a little child, the father

looks after the child as best as he can, assisted by some kind relation or neighbour.

Until the child is grown up sufficiently, it is not allowed by its parents and other relatives to go near the pond or near the cattle from fear of injury. In the morning, mother or elder sister helps it to finish its nature's call and cleanse its mouth and face. Then the mother gives it food. Afterwards, the brother or sister takes it to the courtyard and plays with it. During winter morning, it is often seen that a mother smears the child's body with oil and puts it on a mat in the sun from the belief that this would be good for its health.

During summer, the child is regularly given a good wash but this is done occasionally in the cold season.

After the wash, the child is fed by the mother and put to sleep. The child is fed again in the afternoon. After finishing her night meal, the mother feeds the child and lulls it to sleep by her side for the night. When the child falls ill, the mother nurses it with all possible care, curtailing her routine duties, if necessary.

In the agricultural season, in a nuclear family, when there is no one to look after the child at home, the child is taken by the parents to the field and kept in a suitable place where it can be watched by the parents while they are working. This type of care of the child is also seen among other castes and communities of the Sunderban area as also among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur plateau.

(H) PATTERNS OF INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

The behaviour pattern of a particular society can better be judged if the interpersonal relationship pattern between different relatives is studied. In the forthcoming paragraphs, the relationship pattern in between different primary relatives of the Orāon society of the Sunderban area, has been discussed.

(1) HUSBAND AND WIFE:

The conjugal life between husband and wife starts after marriage. They, generally, do not want to depart from each

other once they have started a settled life. Their conjugal love is quite similar to what one would see it among the couples of the neighbouring castes and communities. The husband earns, and the wife manages the household duties. Although in all socio-religious activities, the husband's opinion dominates, still the wife's view is not neglected. The husband often discusses with his wife in matters concerning their family, the marriage of children etc. They also co-operate with each other in connection with the bringing up of the children. In the economic life, both husband and wife are co-partners. Besides preparing of food, nourishing of children and doing household works, the wife also helps her husband in the field doing different types of agricultural operations such as weeding, transplanting, harvesting etc. The wife always looks after the welfare of her husband and the family. The husband also takes all possible care if the wife falls ill. The wife always uses *high talk* about her husband while the husband generally uses *low talk*. Sometimes conflict may arise between them due to disagreement, quarrelsome habit, torture, sterility, loose character, drunkenness etc. which ultimately lead to divorce. It is often seen that they try to settle minor disputes or also some major disputes by compromise thereby re-establishing family equanimity. Sex-life has much importance to an Orāon couple. Due to the social prohibition of pre-and extra-marital activities, the Orāon couple generally satisfy their carnal appetite within themselves. On the whole, it may be said, that an Orāon couple performs its duties and obligations sincerely and enjoys a happy and peaceful life.

(II) *Father and Son:*

From childhood to adolescence, and even sometimes upto adult stage, the father is the philosopher, guide and trainer of the child. When the son is just a little grown up (about 10 or 12 years old), the father takes him to different places, in markets etc. to acquaint him with the outer world, and also leads him to the field to train in different agricultural

activities. The father is a strict disciplinarian. Though he has a tender feeling towards the son, still never he forgets to scold him for slackness, disobedience etc. When the son is sufficiently grown up, he takes a good bit of share of the father's work. When the father becomes very old and unable to do heavy work, the Orāon son maintains him, though the old man carries on lighter work at home.

In general, the sons obey their father's authority and greatly respect him. When the sons are young, the father has the absolute authority over his sons and also on the family; but as the sons grow old, the father does not try to exert his fullest authority over them. The grown up sons are generally consulted by the father in various socio-economic and other important family affairs. The married sons sometimes, after marriage, start new households, and in this respect also, the father helps them considerably in getting them settled.

(III) *Father and Daughter:*

The relationship between father and daughter among the Orāons of this area, is very sweet and affectionate. During agricultural seasons, the daughter often takes meal for the father to the field. When the father returns from work, she takes care of the father by giving him water to wash his face and feet and also to drink. It is often seen, that an affectionate father is buying ornaments, clothes or other little fancy goods from the *hāt* (weekly market) for his little daughter. The daughter is very much loved by the father, and in return the daughter also loves him to the fullest extent. The father always keeps close connection with his daughter, even after her marriage.

(IV) *Mother and Son:*

From the birth upto the period of adolescence, the relationship between mother and son is more intimate than afterwards. She rears up her son by her own milk. She carries him about and lulls him to sleep. She never tolerates when

somebody does harm to her son. She takes her son by her side during sleep at night. She also scolds her son like the father, in case of disobedience and mischief. The grown up son helps his mother economically by working in the field or by earning money by labour. When the son goes to marry, he takes permission of his mother, and the mother in return takes him in her lap and kisses him. During the childhood of the sons, mother's authority over them predominates but it gets weaker and weaker as the sons grow older or get married.

(V) *Mother and Daughter:*

The feelings of the mother toward her daughter is quite similar to that of the son. The daughter obeys her mother and loves her, gets scoldings from her mother for not properly doing a work or for disobedience etc. From her childhood (from age about 8 or 9) she begins to help her mother by taking care of the younger ones, giving food to the domestic animals, bringing fuel, taking food for her father to the field etc. As she grows older she goes on helping her mother more and more in her domestic work till she gets married. The mother trains her daughter about the household works so that she may not face difficulty in her husband's house. After marriage, when the daughter departs for her husband's house, the mother takes her on her lap for the last time with tears in her eyes.

The mother plays the most significant role in the training of her daughter, as in the case of the father for the son.

(VI) *Brother and Brother:*

Though a tender feeling of affection exists between the elder and the younger brothers, the elder one usually dominates over his younger brother. When they are young enough, they play together, rejoice together and quarrel together. Gradually as they grow older, they become more and more self-preserved. In the family, economic co-operation exists be-

tween them. Both of them go to the field to earn cash money and help maintaining the family. Whenever the younger brother is asked about any socio-economic aspect of the family, he generally refers this to his elder brother.

At times, an opposite picture is also seen. The two brothers quarrel and get separated from one another after the death of the father. The conflict arises in connection with the shares of different types of property etc.

On the whole, an Orāon elder brother is respected by the younger brother, and his advice is sought in almost all socio-economic and religious affairs of the family.

(VII) *Sister and Sister:*

In the Orāon society of the Deltaic Bengal, intimacy exists between two sisters from their very childhood, till they get married. They are always co-operative to each other. They play together, roam together and help each other in every domestic affair of the household. After their marriage also, they always try to keep in touch with the other. They visit each other's house, thereby keeping a close relationship in between them. It is often seen that the younger sister learns about the mystic affairs of the pubertal life from her elder sister.

(VIII) *Brother and Sister:*

The relation between a brother and a sister in the Orāon community of this tract (before attaining puberty), is very tender and intimate. They play together and sleep in the same bed. But getting maturity, the sister enters into household activities, and the brother goes to the wider field of the world to earn livelihood. Though they are now not playmates, still their affection never fades away. Even after maturity, the sister helps her ill brother or a brother looks after his weak sister. If his sister is not married during the lifetime of the father, he maintains her and gives her away in marriage. It is often seen that a brother maintains his widowed sister.

(IX) *Grand-Parent and Grand-Children:*

In an Orāon village of Sunderban it is often seen that a grand-father becomes playmate to his grand-son, or a grand-daughter is hearing stories sitting on her grand-mother's lap. The grand-son is often seen to visit different places, sitting on the shoulder of his *Thākurdādā* (grand-father), or the grand-mother becomes a loving playmate of her *Nātni* (grand daughter).

Joking relationship often exists between them. *Thākurdādā* (grand-father) often addresses his *Nātni* (grand-daughter) as *Sālī* (wife's younger sister) or calls her as his *little wife* out of joke, which makes the latter a bit bashful and in return she abuses the grand-father jokingly. The *Thākurdidi* (grand-mother), who is often a good story teller, addresses her grandson jokingly as her *little husband*.

In connection with grand-parent and grand-children relationship among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur area, Roy says, "There appear to be reasons for inferring the former existence amongst the Orāons (before clan exogamy was instituted) of a system of marriage or union between persons related to each other as grand-parent (or grand-uncle) and grand-child (or grand-nephew or grand-niece)" (1915: 352)

Among the Orāons of Sunderban, marriage or any other type of union between these two grades of relatives, is totally absent. Further, no sexual relation is permitted even between the persons related to each other as grand-parent and grand-child in a classificatory sense.

(X) *Parents-in-law and Daughter-in-law:*

When the daughter-in-law first enters the house of her parents-law, she salutes them for their blessings. The tender feelings and affection grow between the new bride and her husband's parents as soon as the marriage is over. Coming to the house of her husband, she always tries to relieve her mother-in-law in every domestic affair, and also her father-in-law in the field by doing different tit-bits such as weeding.

harvesting etc. so as to win their affection. The mother-in-law teaches her how to adapt herself to this family environment, how to carry on domestic duties smoothly, how to behave properly with the relatives, how to serve the husband and other elder members of the family etc. She also nurses her parents-in-law when they fall ill. The daughter-in-law looks to her parents-in-law as her parents, and the parents of her husband also treat her as their daughter. As soon as the daughter-in-law comes to her parents-in-law's house, she is under their direct authority, and she must obey them.

(XI) *Parents-in-law and Son-in-law :*

The relation between parents-in-law and their son-in-law does not remain so thick after some years of marriage as it is during the first few years of the latter's nuptial. The parents-in-law, in general, remain affectionate to their *Dāmād* (son-in-law). In a few cases, the parents-in-law maintain their daughter's husband life-long in their house as *gharjāmāi* (especially, when they have no son excepting a daughter, whom they do not like to part with). In this case, daughter's husband lives in his wife's father's house, works for him and spends the major part of his earnings for his father-in-law's family.

(XII) *Paternal uncle and the Brother's Child :*

In general, the paternal uncle is affectionate towards his brother's child. Sometimes, the uncle carries the nephew on his lap or tosses him in the air to make him cheerful. When the child grows older, the relationship is not so deep. The nephew generally respects his uncle, and consults him in times of distress.

The above discussions in a nutshell about the interpersonal relationship pattern in between different primary relatives of the Orāons of the Sundesban area give a picture about the societal profile in this regard. In this connection, it may here be said, that such type of relationship pattern also exists.

now-a-days among the Orāons of Ranchi, and also to a large extent among the different neighbouring castes and communities around the Orāons of Sunderban.

(i) POSITION OF WOMAN:

In the Orāon society of Southern Bengal, the social status of a woman is recognised not by her own merit but by her position, as a daughter, wife or mother of a man. Here the woman never challenges the superiority of the male, for she remains physiologically handicapped during certain period of her life time, i.e. during periodic cycle (menstruation), pregnancy and the nursing period. In most of the spheres of social activities, she is relegated to a comparatively lower status—here she is recessive to man.

The status or position of woman in the Orāon society of Sunderban can be judged by analysing the role she plays in the domestic, economic, social, political and religious spheres of the society.

(I) *Domestic Sphere:*

The woman manages the internal affairs of a house. Her duty is to carry on the household activities properly. Though the house is mainly built and repaired by the male members of the family, it is the woman who keeps it trim. She is often seen to clean the house with a solution of cowdung, earth and water. Besides this, she performs all the household duties, such as bringing water and fuel, preparing meal, washing domestic utensils and clothings etc. which give her very little time for leisure and recreation. From her childhood till death, she has to work hard; prior to marriage she helps her mother in her father's family, and after marriage she helps her mother-in-law in her father-in-law's house or has to work alone in her husband's house.

Further, along with the household duties, she has to look after and nurse her younger brothers, sisters and old and ailing parents before she gets married, and after marriage simi-

lar duties fall to her lot in her father-in-law's house.

In the household activities mentioned above, she has enough liberty to work independently in a nuclear family, and is responsible for her duties. In this respect, the male members generally do not poke their nose, though in some cases, she has to take the consent of the male members. Besides the above, she has also to take care of the domestic animals and poultry birds.

(II) *Economic Sphere:*

The Orāons of the Sunderban area are agriculturists. In the agricultural field, the members of both the sexes co-operate. The female folk help their male partners in different agricultural activities, such as weeding, transplanting, harvesting etc.

In the kitchen-garden also, she shares work equally with her husband. She also weaves mats of date palm leaf in leisure time, and sells different commodities (agricultural and non-agricultural), to the agents and or in the weekly market. She also buys the daily necessary articles for her family from the market.

Besides the above, in some cases, the Orāon women folk also work as day labourers or agricultural labourers, and thus help their families financially.

So, it is seen, that for the economic betterment of the family, the Orāon women also have to work like the males. But inspite of all their sacrifices for the proper maintenance of the family, the man does not think her to be equal to himself in status.

(III) *Social Sphere:*

In the Orāon society of Deltaic Bengal, the woman's social position varies according to the social status of the husband, or of the husband's father or of her own father or of her son. Though the parents get an amount of money

during the marriage of their daughter as bride price, still a boy is valued more than a girl in an Orāon family. So, the birth of a son is more eagerly wished for than that of a daughter, as the son is the permanent economic asset of a family. He helps his parents in old age economically, and also protects the family from the hands of enemies, though the woman indirectly helps the society by giving birth to male members.

In the Orāon society of this area, as soon as the girl gets her womanhood, she is vested with certain restrictions and taboos. She is not allowed to establish sexual relation with other male members; she is prohibited to dance or sing freely with other young men except in a few permissible cases.

In rare cases, a girl is seen herself to select her life's partner. A wife has to observe a strict moral code. Again, a man may have more than one wife, but a wife remains satisfied with a single husband.

After marriage, when a girl goes to the house of her husband, quite a number of restrictions and taboos are imposed upon her in different periods of her life, during menstruation, pregnancy etc. Though these taboos or restrictions are meant to be protective, preventive or productive, these encroach to a considerable extent on her freedom in the family. The husband is often seen to consult with the wife for the marriage of the children or any other socio-economic activity to be held in the family. The right to divorce has given some liberty to break off from partnership in extreme cases of debauchery etc.

(IV) *Political Sphere:*

In the political sphere of the Orāon society in Sunderban, woman has generally no part to play, and she has been given almost no right to contest for the post of village official or even to vote for such a selection or to take part in the administrative activities of the village Panchayet. However, she is now free to vote for the General Elections.

The Orāon girl generally does not inherit her father's property (except under certain circumstances), and is not allowed to succeed to her father's office.

(V) *Religious Sphere:*

In the religious aspect also, the woman has her position much lower than the male. She is generally not allowed to take active part in the religious activities. She can not function as a religious official or medicine man. In almost all the religious festivities the males take the dominant role except in the *Tusu* festival, which is primarily meant for the females.

So, it is seen that in almost all the spheres of life and activities, the female's position is distinctly lower than that of the males.

The position of women in the Orāon society as discussed above, is practically similar to what is found among other backward people of the locality around them. But the women of the higher castes of the locality around them, enjoy definitely better status in this respect, on account of the liberalising influence of education and social upliftment. The picture among the Ranchi Orāons is almost similar to what is found among the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

(J) CEREMONIAL FRIENDSHIP

Among the Orāons of Sunderban, there exists a peculiar custom of *Ceremonial Friendship*. Though at present this custom is gradually fading away, still it is practised in a few families generally who have a better economic and social position. These ceremonial friendships or artificial relationships are of two types:—

(A) between two or more Orāon families,

(B) between two or more families of different communities.

Type "A" may be divided into two sub-types:—

(1) *Sāiyā* or friendship between two or more Orāon females.

(2) *Sāngi* or friendship between two or more Orāon males.

Type "B" may also in the same way be divided into:—

(1) *Bandhu* or friendship between two or more males of which one is an Orāon.

(2) *Bandhuni* or friendship between two or more females of which one is an Orāon.

In all the above cases, the ceremony performed is the same. Any day of any month would serve the purpose of this ceremony. In the morning of a particular day, two or more boys or girls (this ceremony is observed in cases of young boys and girls) sit on *Piñi* (wooden seats) or on the *Mātiā* (mat of date palm leaves). Then they are given two garlands of beads (generally made from *Tulsi* or sacred basil branch) with which they garland each other. Then the parents of the two give advice to both to stand side by side life-long, even at the time of distress. After this a feast is given. Friendships are not made by boys or girls before obtaining formal permission of their parents.

Of the above two types of friendship, the second one (Type B) is very rare in occurrence. Further, it is comparatively more easily contracted between two tribal groups than a tribal and a non-tribal group. This may probably be due to some inherent prejudices of the non-tribal people towards the tribals.

Sometimes, the fathers of these friends are also known to each other as *Sāiyā* or *Sāngi* as the case may be. The ritual friendship is generally based on personal choice, and never takes place between a girl and a boy i.e. between two opposite sexes. This is always unisexual, and never cross-sexual.

Among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area, this type of ceremonial friendship is also found. The ritual friendship, which lies between two married women is *Sāhiāro*. In connection with this ritual friendship, Roy says, "Apparently to

make up for the absence of any natural bond of union between the wives of the Orāons of a village, the ancient organizers of Orāon society devised an interesting mode of effecting an artificial but sufficiently strong bond of union between the wives of the Orāons of each village and, derivatively, between their respective families" (1915 : 397). Generally this ceremony takes place once in every three years. Besides the above, among the young Orāon girls of Ranchi, a few other minor forms of friendship may also be found of which *Goi* and *Karam-dair* are the most common forms. But the masculine forms of ceremonial friendships, which lie between the Orāon boys, are *Iār* and *Sāngi*. When two *Iārs* or *Sāngis* are married, their wives address each other as *Iārin* or *Sāngin* as the case may be.

The ceremonial friendship is also found among different other castes and communities of the Deltaic Bengal around the Orāons.

(K) ADOPTION OF A CHILD :

A child is rarely adopted in the Orāon society of the Sunderban area. Only a very few childless well-to-do Orāons adopt child from a poor relative or a poor person. This adopted child is known as *Bālpos* or *Pusputra*. No elaborate ceremony is performed for adoption. The child is kept on the lap of the adopter's wife who puts into its mouth some food (usually sweets and rice with milk) cooked by herself in her own house as an indication that the child from now onward belongs to her family. After this, blessings are showered on the child by his new parents and other elderly relatives, and lastly by the head of the Panchayet. Thereafter the occasion is celebrated by giving a feast to the neighbouring villagers, relatives, members of the Panchayet etc. as an indication of the social sanction of the adoption.

From now onwards, he is known and recognised as the son of the new parents, and enjoys all rights like a real son and shoulders all responsibilities of a son towards these parents.

4. MARRIAGE

Marriage is a socially sanctioned relationship between a man and a woman involving economic co-operation, and residential and sexual co-habitation. The culturally patterned norms of this relationship regularly specify who may or may not enter into it, how it may be established and terminated, and what each partner may and may not, do within it. As a relationship, marriage is to be distinguished sharply from the family, the social group within which it is typically embedded.

(A) TYPE:

Monogamy is the general profile of the society of the Orāons of the Sunderban area (incidence above 90 p.c.). Polygyny is practised to a limited extent. This second type of marriage is culturally sanctioned but relatively infrequent (incidence under 10 p.c.), being mainly confined to comparatively a few rich persons of higher status amongst them.

(B) AGE:

The average age of first marriage among the present day Orāons of Sunderban varies from 15 to 18 years in case of males, and 12 to 15 years for females. Formerly, marriage at a higher age was generally practised by them. The lowering of the marital age among them may be due to the local Hindu influence. At present, in a few cases, marriages at a higher age are noticed among some of them which are mainly due to bad economic condition or temporary social ostracism of a family. There is no definite age gap for remarriage of a divorced man/woman or widow/widower.

Among the Orāons of Ranchi district, adult marriage is in general the rule of the society.

(C) ARRANGEMENT:

Marriage is generally arranged by the parents. Sometimes a marriage go-between is employed for the purpose. Daugh-

ter is generally never consulted in the matter of the choice of the son-in-law. In a few cases, the parties themselves select their own marital partners.

(D) REGULATION:

As discussed earlier (chapter on *Sib*), these Orāons of Southern Bengal, strictly follow the rule of sib exogamy i.e. marriage is forbidden with any member of the same sib. Further, there is a comparative reluctance in arranging marriage from the sib of the maternal grand father. They also do not like to choose their mates within the blood relationship upto three generations from both the parental sides. Marriage with a parallel cousin as well as with a cross-cousin is forbidden among the Orāons of this area, but among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur cross-cousin marriage is still permissible. Roy, also, has expressed the same opinion. He further, reports that the marriage of a son or nephew or a daughter or niece of an Orāon in exchange with a daughter or niece or a son or nephew of another Orāon, is practised by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, and he suspects this to have been borrowed from the local Hindu neighbours and landlords. This type of marriage, which has been styled by Roy as *Golāt-benjā* or *Circular-marriage*, is totally absent among the Orāons of Sunderban.

Here, a man can marry his elder brother's widow (junior levirate) or his wife's younger sister (sororate, though he generally prefers to select a mate from outside any relationship. On the other hand, an Orāon of the Sunderban area is not allowed to marry the widow of his younger brother or his wife's elder sister. Further, marriage by exchange is also generally not preferred by the Orāons of the area, and it is not permitted in between the members of the two families who have established the ties of ceremonial friendship. The marriage between the eldest son of an Orāon with the eldest daughter of another, which is prohibited among the Ranchi Orāons as stated by Roy, is not forbidden here.

(E) FORM:

The most widely practised marriage type among them is by *negotiation*. In a few cases, marriage by *love* or *elopement*

is also seen. When a man has a daughter only (whom he does not want to part with), he arranges to keep his son-in-law in his own house with the consent of the groom's father. This type of marriage system is known as *Gharjāmāi* (*GhardiJoā* in Chotā-Nāgpur). The Orāons generally agree to this type of marriage. Marriage by service or by force (*Sindur-tāpā*) is rarely seen among the present-day Orāons of the Sunderban area.

(F) CONSIDERATION:

Marriages among the Orāons of Sunderban generally involve the payment of a token bride-price by the groom or his relatives to the bride's guardian. The amount of bride price as reported below, is almost fixed among the Orāons of this deltaic area.

(I) In cash— Bride price—Rs. 25/-
Rājā-mārugā—Rs. 2/-
Choukidāri —O. 25nP.

(II) In kind— *Sāri*—6
Dhuti—1

Rice-beer—a few earthen jars (not fixed)

The *Rājāmārugā* was previously paid to the Zemindar of the area, but is now generally taken by the village Panchayet. The village Choukidar takes the *Choukidāri*. The bride-price, in case of a widower or a divorced man marrying an unmarried girl, is much higher than the bride price in case of normal marriage (which may sometimes go beyond Rs. 100). But in case of remarriage with a widow or with a divorced woman, the amount of bride price decreases.

On an average, the total expense in marriage among the Orāons of this area, varies from Rs. 200 to Rs. 400. But in cases of very poor Orāons, the expenditure is much less than the average. In such cases, they approach the Panchayet for the permission of reducing the number of invitees as also for bringing with them (the invitees) some *hāndiā* (country liquor) and cooked food also.

(G) RESIDENCE:

The marital residence among the Orāons of the Sunderban area is of patrilocal type i.e. after marriage, the bride comes to live with or near the husband's male patrilineal kinsmen.

(H) SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AND RESTRICTIONS:

The husband is the aggressive partner in the sexual affair. The wife's role is generally submissive. There is no fixed time or place for the sexual intercourse. Whenever the husband feels the sex urge, he cohabits with his wife. But generally at the time of work, the husband does not have intercourse with his wife. The wife, generally, does not force the husband in cohabitation, when he is lacking in sex urge. Normally, the sexual intercourse is performed in the house but during some festive occasions, some Orāons, sometimes cohabit outside the house in some bushy areas.

The above pattern of sex behaviour between husband and wife among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, is quite similar to that of the Orāons of the Ranchi area.

(I) PRE-MARITAL AND EXTRA-MARITAL SEX RELATIONS:

Both pre-marital and extra-marital sex relations are strictly forbidden among the Orāons of Sunderban. If a girl happens to become pregnant before her marriage, the boy responsible for this is forced to marry the girl. For this act of crime, the boy concerned or his father has to pay a fine to the guardian of the girl. The extra-marital sex relation is looked upon as a serious social offence for which the society outcasts the person or persons concerned. Pre-marital sex relations are still found among the Ranchi Orāons, while that of extra-marital relationship is of rare occurrence, which is generally disapproved but not strictly forbidden.

The adoption of the idea of *sinful deed, immoral act* etc. in connection with the pre-marital and extra-marital sex.

relations by the Orāons of the Sunderban area, is mainly due to the profound influence of the neighbouring caste Hindus who follow this moral code.

(J) DIVORCE:

The incidence of divorce among the Orāons of Sunderban is not so high as is found among the Orāons of the Ranchi area. The divorce can be initiated by either party on the ground of the opposite party being mad, impotent, barren, adulterous or quarrelsome etc. Again when the couple has a child, generally, the society does not give permission for separation. If separation takes place, inspite of having a child, and also disapproving society's view, then the child, if he or she still requires nursing, is allowed to live with the mother, otherwise the child lives with the father.

It is found from the above discussions, that the Sunderban Orāons have retained a good bit of norms regarding marriages and sex relations that are prevalent among the Ranchi Orāons, but nevertheless some distinct differences are discernible which are definitely due to influence of the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities, especially relating to moral and ethical codes.

5. INHERITANCE AND PARTITION OF PROPERTY

The principles of inheritance and partition of property, in general, among the Orāons are mainly based on social and economic conditions of the people, influenced to some extent by the religious beliefs also. Relating to the customary principles of inheritance and partition of property of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur plateau, Roy says, "The customary rules that regulate the devolution of property amongst the Orāons, appear to have been determined partly, if not primarily, by their peculiar belief in the state of human soul after death, and partly by social and economic conditions" (1915 : 369). These people also believe that after death, the spirit of the dead person resides in the underworld along with the spirits

of the deceased Orāons of the same sib of the village, forming a compact group. During *Hānborā* or *Kohā-benjā* (i.e. bone drowning ceremony), the Orāons offer food and other articles to these spirits who in return look after the welfare of the property of these people. "And should even a married daughter of the family stealthily take away to her husband's place any property belonging to her father or brothers, the property is sure to be followed by some spirit of her father's village and sickness or some other affliction is sure to be caused in her husband's family." (Roy : 1915 : 371). But among the present-day Orāons of the Ranchi area, specially among the Christian Orāons, this conception of the spirit control of the property has faded away considerably. Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, this conception is practically non-existent probably due to the absence of *Hānborā* or 'bone drowning' ceremony, which is believed to be a means of unifying and pacifying the spirits of the dead in the under-world.

The property among the Sunderban Orāons may be divided into the following two main categories :—

- A. Ancestral Property : which is inherited from the ancestors.
- B. Self-acquired Property : which is acquired by the person concerned during his lifetime.

These two categories of property may either be movable or immovable. Movable property includes domestic animals, ploughs and other agricultural implements, cash money, domestic utensils, furniture, clothings, ornaments etc., and immovable property implies landed and house property.

In a Nuclear type of Orāon family of the southern area of West Bengal, the husband (the male head of the family) has the absolute right over both ancestral as well as self-acquired property. In an extended type of family, in theory everything earned by the members of the family must be handed over to the head of the family, but in practice this rule is not strictly observed by them now-a-days. It often happens that some of the members of the family secretly keep apart some amount of their own earnings for their personal use.

The head of the joint family has the right over the ancestral property along with his brothers and others.

An Orāon father of this area generally divides his property during his lifetime, though the division of property after death is also not of rare occurrence. The father divides his property among the sons towards the later part of his life, in order to eliminate any possible hitch that might arise after his death among the sons. But on many occasions, the father has to agree to divide the property from annoyance caused by grown-up sons, pressing for their shares being divided to enable them to start their independent establishments. Roy has also observed similar types of situations in connection with the partition of property among the Orāons of Ranchi, about which he writes, "That this is so, would appear from the recognised right of a married son to demand the partition of the family property in the father's lifetime in certain circumstances.....when the father marries a second wife or, less often, when the sons' wives do not well agree with their mother-in law or sister in law or perhaps when the son is at variance with his father or brothers" (1915 : 377).

The mode of inheritance among the Orāons of Southern Bengal is from father to sons. If there be more than one son, then the property goes to all the sons in equal shares. As long as a son is alive, he will be entitled to his due share, but the daughter has no right of inheritance, though she would be entitled to get maintenance from the property of her father till she gets married.

Regarding the denial of the right of inheriting the property by women among the Orāons (where male descendants are present), it may be said, that the Orāons believe that the daughters by marriage pass out of the father's or brother's family, and are debarred from taking part in the sacrificial offerings and libations made to the ancestral spirits of their father's family (during different religious festivities), and hence lose all rights on the family property. Again, a married woman can neither offer any oblations to the deceased ancestors of the husband's family nor can join in the worship of the genuine Orāon village deities, and hence she is also not en-

titled to absolute inheritance of property belonging to her husband's family.

If property is divided during the lifetime of the father, one share is kept for the father, equal to the share of each son in general. In cases of division of property by a father before his death, he looks to the shares of his minor sons till they become adults. If a father has unmarried daughters to maintain, he may keep for himself a proportionately higher share than his sons to enable him to maintain the daughters till their marriage.

When a man has sons, by more than one wife, the property is inherited equally by all the sons. Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area generally no discrimination is made in connection with the division of property between the sons of different wives. Roy reports about such type of discrimination among the Orāons of the Ranchi area a long time ago, but at present in majority of such cases no discrimination is practised by them regarding the inheritance of property.

When an Orāon of Sunderban has only an adopted son and no other, heir, the property is inherited in absolute right by the adopted son.

On the death of son or sons, of a man during his lifetime leaving sons of the predeceased sons, the son or sons of each predeceased son inherit the shares that their father or fathers would have received if they survived the last owner.

When a man has no son or son of his son, then the property is inherited by his brothers of the same father.

When a man has no son, son's son or brother, then the property passes to the sons of his brothers.

In the absence of son, son's son, brother, brother's son etc., the property of a man is inherited by the father's brothers and in the absence of them to the father's brother's son.

As a daughter is not ordinarily entitled to inherit property, the father can make a will authorising the daughter to inherit property of her father after his death, in the absence of any son to inherit, with the proviso that the maintenance of his widow during her lifetime is a condition to that, and this the daughter shall have to do even after her marriage.

When the division of property takes place during a man's lifetime, one share is kept for his own maintenance, and after his death this share is inherited by the widow, who, if she likes, can stay with any of her sons, who would look to her share of property and give her maintenance. After her death, the property is equally divided among the sons.

If a person dies without children, his wife gets life interest in the self-acquired property of her husband, and after her death or if she remarries an outsider, the property goes to her husband's brother or husband's brother's son or to their descendants.

After the death of the mother, her ornaments and other personal belongings are given to the unmarried daughters along with daughter-in-laws.

From the above we may deduce two fundamental rules that guide the Orāon society regarding the inheritance of property. These are :—

(i) The property must not pass out of the sib i.e. it must remain within the jurisdiction of the relatives belonging to the same sib (after marriage the daughter is no longer regarded as belonging to the father's sib), and (ii) The property should not be inherited in absolute right by a woman (excepting in a few cases).

The above pattern of inheritance of the property of the Orāons of Sunderban is practically similar to that of the Ranchi Orāons. But at present, due to impact of Hindu Succession Act (which entitles women to inherit proportionate shares with male survivors), a few Orāons of this area feel that the daughters should also get shares of the father's property like the sons, as all are the offsprings of the same father. It is thus clear that in the matter of inheritance also the Sunderban Orāons are being influenced by the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities.

6. SUCCESSION

The succession to office is restricted only to the male line, and never to the female line because of the predominance of

the males in the Orāon society. It is the eldest son who generally succeeds to the office of his father, when the father is dead, or becomes very old and incapable of properly carrying on the duties of the office. Succession to the office follows the same principle as in the case of inheritance with the exception that the post being only one it goes to one person, namely the eldest son. The next nearest adult male kin holds the office temporarily in his absence.

In the Sunderban area, among the Orāons, the office of the head-man (*Rājmorālship*) in many villages has been hereditary, though at present, in a few villages, efficiency, power and popularity have been given preference over the hereditary right.

For example in Dheknāmārī village of Sandeshkhali P. S. *Rājmorālship* is hereditary; the present *Rājmorāl* Durgācharan Kāchuā and his forefathers having enjoyed this post for the last four generations in succession. Similar is the case in the Orāon villages of Choto Sairā, Nāzāt, Metekhālī etc.

In the case of Boyārmari village, of Sandeshkhali P. S., however, though the *Rājmorālship* was first held by Sanchāran Musā, and after him by his eldest son Bhosā Musā, the latter's eldest son Kalipada after enjoying it for a few years, was knocked off from his *Rājmorālship* for inefficiency and negligence, and the post was given to Kanai Tirki (popular *Mantri* of the Panchayet) who was believed to be quite efficient.

The offices of the village priest (*Pāhān*), medicine man (*Gūnin*) and magician (*Matī*) have not been hereditary in the true sense, because these specialists keep some trainees to whom they give training in their specialities. Among the trainees, the son or sons of the above mentioned functionaries may also be included. But the functionaries select as their successors the most efficient among their trainees.

From discussions with Orāons of several other villages, it has been found that they are now feeling more inclined to give preference to efficiency rather than to hereditary right in the selection of community heads.

It is seen from the above that the present-day Orāons

also are imbibing the democratic ideas of the present time, and this is in tune with the recent move of establishing village Panchayets etc. on strict democratic principles. It is pleasing to note that this type of democratisation tendency is being observed among other communities of the area also.

7. DESCENT AND KIN-GROUPS

In every society, individuals maintain interpersonal relationships, characterised by particular kinship terms and culturally patterned behaviour, with each type of relative recognised by the prevailing kinship system. In addition, an individual is normally affiliated with one or more kin-groups, each consisting of some, but not all, of his relatives. By "descent" is meant a cultural rule defining the types of relatives with whom an individual is affiliated in a kin-group. It need not, and commonly does not imply that these relatives are more closely akin to him than are those who do not belong to the same group.

Descent and kin-groups of the Orāons of Sunderban and of Ranchi are quite similar, and may be stated as follows :—

1. *Patrilineal Kin-groups and Exogamy.*

Sibs, in the absence of specific evidence of moieties, phratries, and segmentary unilinear organisation. Sib exogamy, i.e. marriage is forbidden with any member of the same sib (or larger unilinear kin-group) in the absence of maximal extension.

2. *Matrilineal Kin-groups and Exogamy.*

Absence of any unilinear kin-groups with the rule of descent in question. Marriage with a parallel cousin is forbidden, unilinear exogamy being absent.

3. *Bilateral and Bilinear Kin-groups and Exogamy.*

Patrilineal descent, kindreds being untraceable. Cross-cousin marriage is forbidden symmetrically.

CHAPTER VI

LIFE CYCLE

The life-cycle of the Orāons of Sunderban in its different phases, is marked by different types of rites, rituals, restrictions and prohibitions etc. But due to their prolonged contact with the new social environment of the neighbouring communities of the Sunderban area, a good deal of modification has taken place in these ritualistic beliefs and practices. This process of modification is also further accelerated due to lack of any sort of contact with their kinsmen of the Ranchi area for generations.

In this chapter different phases of the life-cycle of the Orāons of Sunderban have been dealt with in order to show how an individual passes from one phase of life to another, and how the society equips him to adjust himself to the different phases of life.

A MENSTRUATION :

An Orāon girl gathers the knowledge of menstruation and of sex-life from her elder sister or mother or from the neighbouring girls who have attained maturity. The physical maturity of the Orāon girls of this area, generally, takes place in the earlier part of their teen-age. The girl understands that her youth has bloomed when her monthly course (*Māsik*)

starts. Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, there is no definite puberty rite either for girls or for boys. The physical and mental changes remind them of the appearance of puberty in them. Suddenly, they become more grave and serious about their life. At the time of first menstruation or in the successive menstruations during her monthly period, generally no specific rites and rituals are observed, only that she is considered to be unclean on these particular days. When the menstruation is over, she has to take bath in the nearby pond or canal to become clean. After being clean, she can perform her household duties. The taboos and prohibitions connected therewith are that a menstruating girl is not permitted to take part in any religious festivities or to carry on her household duties until she becomes clean. The socio-economic activities of the house will become inauspicious and harmful, if an unclean person takes part therein.

No separate room or shed is specially meant for this menstruating woman. During inter-menstruating periods (i.e. during intervals), no prohibition is imposed on her activities. No particular taboo or restriction is imposed upon the family members of the menstruating woman, except that her husband must abstain from establishing any sex relation with her during the period. Almost identical rites and prohibitions are observed by the menstruating women of the Orāon community of Ranchi district, and also by those of different castes and communities like Bāgdi, Pod, Māhishya, Mundā, Bhumij etc. of the Sunderban area of Bengal.

B. PREGNANCY :

The Sunderban Orāons generally do not observe any special rite or ritual during the period of pregnancy. But in a few cases, during first pregnancy, *BurāBuri* (Ancestral spirits) is worshipped by them with the sacrifice of a chicken. This rite is generally performed after the end of the fourth month of pregnancy, but before the seventh month. Roy reports that the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur used to perform an elaborate ceremony, in connection with pregnancy, known

as *Jodā Kāmnā*. The purpose of this ceremony was to sever all connections of the pregnant woman with the ancestral spirits, village deities and spirits of her father.

The *Jodā Kāmnā* ceremony is still noticed to be practised by a few Orāons of the Ranchi area, with some modifications.

(I) DETERMINATION OF PREGNANCY:

It is universally accepted by the Orāons of both Bengal and Bihar, and also by other communities that sexual union is necessary before a woman becomes pregnant. When the monthly course stops, the Orāons become sure of pregnancy, and the outward changes of a woman's body strengthen their assumption. The outwardly changes of physical body of the expectant mother induce an Orāon to assume that the pregnancy is progressing steadily.

(II) COUNTING OF MONTHS:

The Orāons generally count the months of pregnancy from the day of stopping of the menstruation. Sometimes, by performing a magical rite of dropping oil on the ground, an elderly Orāon woman or the midwife tries to determine the duration of the pregnancy. Sometimes, by palpating the belly of the pregnant woman a midwife or an experienced elderly woman can also opine about the duration of the pregnancy. Among the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons, the counting of months is sometimes done by observing different phases of the moon.

(III) TABOOS AND PROHIBITIONS DURING PREGNANCY

The following are a few taboos and prohibitions observed by the Orāons of Sunderban during pregnancy. These taboos and prohibitions are also observed by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur and also by many castes and communities of former area.

Restriction about co-habitation : During the earlier

part of pregnancy, the husband does not cease to co-habit with his wife, but generally he refrains from this after the third or fourth month of pregnancy or even upto the fifth. They believe that co-habitation during the later part of pregnancy is harmful for both the mother and the foetus in the womb.

Restriction in food : In the same way no restriction on food is imposed during the first six months of pregnancy. But from seventh month onward till the birth of the child, the pregnant woman is not allowed to take any non-vegetarian food such as meat, fish, egg etc. She, generally, takes only rice, vegetables etc. as her meal during this period. She is also not permitted to take highly-spiced food at this period. This taboo on food is generally observed for the welfare of the child in the womb.

Restriction on movement or work : A woman performs almost all her household and extra-household duties (such as fishing, some agricultural operations etc.) during the earlier phases of her pregnancy. But afterwards, she observes some restrictions on her movement and work. From the sixth month for her pregnancy, she stops taking bath but puts a little water on her head. Generally from fourth or fifth month, a woman abstains from heavy domestic work. She must not carry loads; working in the agricultural field and fishing etc. are also prohibited for her. All these restrictions are observed for the welfare of the child and the mother.

Regarding movement, the expectant mother is not allowed to run or work quickly. She must not visit a house where a death has taken place or where the mourning period is going on till the post-funeral rites are over. She is also not permitted to participate in the funeral ceremony, and is prohibited from going near a grave or some lonely places, or to get out of her room after dusk. She is also not allowed to come out of her house during storm, lightening and thunder. The breach of any of these restrictions and taboos are believed to be harmful to both the mother and the embryo on account of the bad influence of the evil spirits.

There is no such restriction on the part of the husband and other members of the family.

In connection with the restrictions observed by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, Roy says, "it is only in Hinduized Orāon families that any restrictions are placed on food and drink used by pregnant woman". (1928 : 116).

(IV) PROTECTION DURING PREGNANCY

In order to protect the expectant mother and unborn baby from the evil spirits, evil eyes etc., the Orāon women put on certain amulets given by the *Gunin*. The *Gunin* collects roots of particular plant or plants on fullmoon or new-moon days and puts that into the amulet with the performance of some magical rites. This is now tied on to the upper arm of the left hand of the pregnant woman. This charmed amulet is regarded as prophylactic against the evil spirit, evil eye etc.

(V) DETERMINATION OF THE SEX OF THE UNBORN BABY:

The Orāons of this area have little or no idea regarding the identification of the sex of the unborn baby. They say that if the expectant mother, in the later part of her pregnancy, walks giving pressure on her left leg, the child in the womb is male and if on the right leg it is female.

But among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, "if during labour pains the woman leans on her right hand against the ground while getting up, it is believed the child is on the right side of the womb and must therefore be a male. If she leans on her left hand, the baby is believed to rest on the left side of the womb and to be a female by sex" (Roy : 1928 : 119). There is also another method adopted by some of the Orāons of Ranchi district. The husband of the expectant woman goes to the jungle, and by longitudinally splitting a branch of a particular plant, if he finds black worms inside it, the child will be a male one, but if he sees red worms, it will be a female.

The Ranchi Orāons take the number of knots present in the umbilical cord as the indication of the number of children

the woman will bear. But such a belief is not present among the Sunderban Orāons.

(VI) DIFFICULT LABOUR

No special rite is performed in case of any difficult labour of the expectant mother. The midwife generally rubs the belly of the woman with luke warm mustard oil which has been sanctified by some magical rites by the *Gunin*. Even during acute pain the same procedure is followed. Many Hindu castes and communities (Pod, Bāgdi, Māhishya etc) of the area also follow the same procedure at the time of any difficult labour.

But according to Roy, among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, during difficult and protracted labour, the covers of all the earthen vessels of the household are taken off, or a handful of rice is fried on an earthen pan and distributed among those present during the occasion. Sometimes, the woman suffering from difficult labour, is asked to fix her gaze on the bark of a tamarind tree which was charred with lightening. Now-a-days the above magical procedures for the relief of difficult labour have gone into disuse among the Orāons of the Ranchi area, and this is specially true of the Christian Orāons.

C. PARTURITION (*CHHUTĀ*)

(I) OBSERVANCES DURING DELIVERY:

The birth of an Orāon child generally takes place in the house of the woman's husband. The woman is, generally, not allowed to go to her father's house or any other place from her husband's after the seventh month of pregnancy. When labour pain starts, the woman is allowed to lie in one portion of the main room on a mat as the Orāons of this area have no fixed lying-in-room. One or more midwives are called in for attending during child birth. At present, the elderly women of the family or of the neighbourhood act as midwives (*Dhāi*). But in the past, women belonging to Ghasi

and Turi castes used to work as midwives among the tribal and non-tribal families of the area. Some rich Orāons even in these days call Ghasi midwives (instead of the women from their own community) to conduct the labour, as this would in an indirect way, mark their high status in the society. To relieve the acute pain and to quicken the delivery, the midwife rubs sanctified oil on the belly of the expectant mother. In Chotā-Nāgpur area, the midwives who generally belong to the same community, are known as *Kusrāins* or *Dhāngrins*. There also the birth of an Orāon child generally takes place in the house of the woman's husband. No lying-in-room is generally constructed, but a cow-shed or portion of the living room is used for the purpose.

During delivery only females are permitted to stay inside the room.

(II) POSITION OF THE EXPECTANT MOTHER DURING DELIVERY

At the time of delivery, the woman kneels on the ground for sometime, and then lies down. After delivery, the umbilical cord is cut by the attending midwife with an iron knife. G. S. Ray³³ and others are of opinion that the parturient woman of Orāon society in Ranchi district is generally made to kneel on the ground leaning backward and is supported by a number of women. It is also supported by Roy. (Roy: 1928: 119). Sometimes she is also made to lie down.

(III) TREATMENT OF UMBILICAL CORD

The midwife takes the placenta in an old earthen vessel, covers its mouth with a lid and buries it in one corner of the courtyard or in the adjoining field. Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, the umbilical cord is cut by means of a knife or a piece of potsherd. The placenta and umbilical cord, together with an old worn-out broom and an old winnowing basket, are now-a-days buried either in the floor of the hut or in that part of the courtyard where the utensils are scraped

and washed or in the manure pit or just outside the room where rain water falls, after covering these with *Sāl* (*Shorea-robusta*) leaves. When the stump of the umbilical cord dries up and drops down it is buried under the threshold of the hut. It is never exposed because of the fear of the evil minded people (witch or wizard) or the evil spirits, who may cause harm to the mother and the new-born baby. As soon as a child is born, the information is conveyed to the men by the women. In Ranchi area, during announcing the birth of a child, either plough or a small bamboo-basket is set up outside the door of the lying-in-room to indicate the sex of the new-born baby.

(IV) CLEANING OF MOTHER AND BABY

After delivery, both mother and new-born baby are cleaned by means of tepid warm water, and then are wiped with dry and clean cloth by the *Dhāi* or the attending women. Sometimes, among Ranchi Orāons, besides luke warm water, *Kanji*-water i.e. rice water which has been kept in air tight jar for two or three days, is used.

(V) RITES ON THE DAY OF BIRTH

Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, no special rite is performed on the day of birth. But in connection with Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons, Roy states about *Paisāri* (a rite, which is performed on the day of birth or within two or three days after it) in which a chicken, rice and copper coins are presented to the *Pāhān* (priest) by the husband of the woman. The *Pāhān* afterwards sacrifices the chicken in order to pacify the presiding spirits of the village. This is observed to a limited extent by the present day Orāons of the Ranchi area.

(VI) PERIOD OF POLLUTION

The period of pollution among the Orāons of Southern Bengal is not fixed. It varies from 5 days to 15 days consider-

ing the condition of the house, and that of the woman. Generally, odd days (5,7,9,11,13 and 15) are selected for observing pollution. But in Ranchi district (during Roy's time) the period of pollution extended only upto three or four days after delivery. But now-a-days, on an average, the period of pollution extends upto the sixth day from the day of birth. The Hindu castes of the Deltaic Bengal, generally observe it from 10 days to a month.

(VII) PROHIBITIONS AND TABOOS DURING THE PERIOD OF POLLUTION

During the period of pollution, the male members of the family are not allowed to sleep at night within the lying-in-room (i.e. main room). During the first seven days of pollution, the woman is not allowed to go out of the lying-in-room, keeping the child alone. The whole family is tabooed from joining in any socio-religious festivities of the village. Further, no socio-religious ceremonies can take place in the house. During the pollution period, the woman who has given birth to the child, is not allowed to do any household work. She only takes rest and nurses her child. Almost the same types of prohibitions and taboos are observed by the Ranchi Orāons and also by neighbouring Hindu castes and communities of Sunderban.

(VIII) TREATMENT

After child birth, the treatment of both the mother and the new born baby is done by performing some magical rites by the *Gunin* in order to safeguard them from the evil spirits, evil eyes etc. The *Dhāi* also gives fomentation to both of them by means of '*Varendā*' (i.e. castor) leaves keeping on hot water. During this period, both mother and the new-born are massaged with tepid mustard oil by the midwife or by the women of the house.

(IX) FOOD

On the day of birth, the mother is not given cooked rice (*Bhāt*) but only fried rice (*Muri*) and hot milk. She is to take vegetables for seven consecutive days after child birth. During these seven days, she must not take meat, fish, egg etc. After seven days, she is generally given cooked rice and fish-soup and some hot milk. Meat is prohibited for two months. The child generally depends on the mother's milk. When the mother's milk is not available, goat's milk or diluted cow's milk is given to the child. For quick flow of milk in her breast, the mother is often given the curry of *Papaya* and soup of *Māskalāi* pulse.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, a curry specially prepared from sun-dried pulse-cakes and *urid* (*Phaseolus roxburghii*) and wild lentils is given to the mother from the belief that it would increase the flow of milk. In this area, on the day of parturition, she is generally given a special soup of *Kunthi* pulse, and sometimes rice boiled with a few pieces of turmeric in water for first three days following the birth.

(X) PURIFICATION:

When the period of pollution is over, the barber (*Parā-mānik* or *Nāpit*) pairs off the nails of all the members of the family and their relatives. Both the mother and the child are rubbed with a paste of turmeric and mustard oil. After this, the child is given a bath in the house with tepid water, but the mother goes to the nearby pond along with a number of women for bath. In the meantime, other women clean and purify the house, courtyard etc. by besmearing with a mixture of cow-dung, earth and water. The clothings and other articles are also washed. Sometimes *Tulsi-jal* (water in which Basil leaves are dipped) is sprinkled to purify persons and the house.

This marks the end of ritual impurity, after which the mother and the new-born baby are allowed to lead normal lives. Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur and also among

many castes and communities of the Sunderban area, purificatory rites observed, are quite similar to those of the Orāons of Sunderban.

(XI) BHELOA-PHARI:

After the purificatory ceremony, the *Ojhā* of the village performs the '*Bheloā-phāri*' ceremony (the details of which are given in the chapter dealing with magico-religious beliefs and practices) for the welfare of the mother, the new-born baby and other family members in the room where the child was born. This ceremony is also performed by the Rānchi Orāons.

(XII) CEREMONIAL FEAST:

A ceremonial feast of cooked rice, chicken curry or pulse-soup and *hāndiā* (rice-brew) is given afterwards by the head of the family to the different relatives, friends and neighbours. Sometimes, relatives bring presents on the occasion of the first sight of the new-born (*Mukh-Dekhā*). The barber and midwife are also invited on this occasion.

(XIII) PAYMENT TO MIDWIFE AND BARBER:

When everything is over, the head of the family (or the husband of the wife) gives the midwife a new cloth and two and a half seers of rice (when she is not related to the parturient mother) as remuneration for her service. The barber is paid a rupee or two considering his labour.

A childless woman or a woman whose child does not survive long etc. makes a prayer with a vow to the Goddess *Sasthi* for a child.

Miscarriage is very rare in Orāon society of the Sunderban area. Only in a few cases where an illegitimate child comes to the womb of a woman belonging to a rich and respectable family, abortions are sometimes done with the consent of the expectant mother and other family members. Abortion is done by Ghasi women (who are experienced in this line) by using

the juice of certain herbs. This method of abortion is known to these Orāons as *Phulmārā*.

The concept of family planning is practically unknown to them. They believe that the children are gifts of god, and as such they have no right to control or check the number of progeny. They want children, mainly sons, in order to get economic prosperity. Now-a-days a very few enlightened Orāons, who have regular contact with the urban life, prefer to have a small family. They think that the fewer the children the better would be the standard of life. As in the case of other spheres of life, a good deal of change has also taken place in the ritualistic structure connected with birth among the Orāons of this deltaic area. For example, there are a few rites (such as *Jodā Kāmnā*, *Paisāri* etc.) which are present among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur plateau, are totally absent here. Some of the new traits, such as, *Sasthi Puṛā*, *Mukhdekhā*, the vow of the childless woman for children etc. are obviously borrowed by the Orāons of Southern Bengal from the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities. These rites are absent among the Orāons of Ranchi District.

D. NAME-GIVING CEREMONY

The name-giving ceremony of the Orāons of Sunderban is known as *Nām tibbā*. It is also known as *Sasthi Puṛā* as the worship of Goddess *Sasthi* takes place along with the name-giving ceremony. There is no fixed time (month or year) for the performance of this ceremony. Generally, before the completion of a year of the child, the name-giving ceremony is held. The fixation of date for this ceremony depends on the economic position of the family. As soon as the family is able to make necessary arrangements, the ceremony takes place. An auspicious day is selected for this ceremony. This day is, generally, selected by the *Gunin* after performing some magical rites. But now-a-days, these people often go to the local Hindus regarding the selection of an auspicious day who after consulting *Pāñji* (almanac), select the day for the name-giving ceremony. There is no fixed time of the day for this ceremony, but generally it takes place either in the morning or in

the afternoon. All the members of the family and others assemble to witness the ceremony.

On the appointed day, the barber and the midwife are called. The barber shaves the head of the child. After the shaving of the head, the midwife performs the *Mīle Pātānā* (i.e. to make friendship with the ancestor) rite. Sometimes, the grand-mother of the child or any elderly female relative performs the ceremony. She takes a little rice beer in a brass cup mixed with water, and in it drops a green grass leaf (*Durbā*). Then she takes three grains of rice—one of which represents *Dharma* or *Bhagwān* (the Supreme deity) as witness to the ceremony, the second one represents any of the ancestors of the child either on the father's line and the third one represents the child itself. Then, after painting vermillion and *Kajal*, (black eye paint) she drops these three grains of rice with the utterance of the name selected for the child or in some cases the name of the ancestors of the child in the brass-cup containing diluted rice-beer. If all these three grains of rice float in the rice-beer, and if the first (*Dharma*) grain touches the third (*child*), and then both the first and the third touch the second grain (ancestor), it is proved that the child has friendship (*Mitā*) with the ancestor.

Again if all or any one of these three grains do not float, but sink down in the rice-beer, three other rice grains are taken and the same process is repeated till the objective is attained.

When the name-giving rite is over, *Sasthi Puja* (i.e. the worship of the Goddess *Sasthi*) is performed by the head of the family or the seniormost male member of the family. The worship is done in the same way as in the case of the worship of the house-hold deities with the exception that no sacrifice is made and no rice-beer is offered. The child is given the *Prasād* (i.e. offerings) of the puja to eat, and its forehead is anointed with vermillion and turmeric paste. Then he is blessed by all the members and the relatives of the family and also by the members of the village Panchayet.

After this a feast is given to the assembled guests.

From that day onward the child is called by the name,

supernaturally selected by the rice-grain in the name-giving ceremony, dropping any previous name.

Sometimes an Orāon child has two names, a nick name and the other the ceremonial name. The ceremonial name is sometimes kept secret and never told to any one because of the fear of sorcery and witchcraft. This is also noticed among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur.

When the ceremony is over the midwife (if not related) and the barber are given some remuneration either in cash or in kind.

Previously, the custom of these people in this region was that in case of a son, the name of the ancestor of mother's line was tried first during the name-giving ceremony. If the procedure did not meet with success, then the name of an ancestor of the father's line was tried ; and if, this also would not succeed, a name from the mother's line was again tried and so on alternately till success was attained. In case of a daughter, the procedure was also similar i.e. first the name of mother's mother and if this would not succeed, then the name of the father's mother was tried and so on alternately.

But at present the ancestral names are genertly not uttered and instead, the modern Bengali names (which are generally prevalent among the local Hindus) are preferred as names.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, almost similar type of ceremony is performed in connection with the name giving ceremony (*Nām pinjnā*), though *Sasthi Pujā* is not practised over there. The Christian Orāons follow the Christian method of name-giving ceremony, generally held at the Church.

Making choice of the names of the ancestors either of father's line or of mother's line, is still prevalent among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur. Besides the ancestral names, names of the day of birth, of day of festival are also generally adopted by the Ranchi Orāons. For example a son born on Sunday (*Eṭwār*) is named as *Eṭwā* and a daughter as *Eṭwāri*. In the same way child born on Wednesday (*Budh*) is named *Budhuā* (for son) or *Budhni* (for daughter) respectively. Again a child born on the day of *Karam* festival is named as *Karmā* if male and *Karmi* if female.

This custom of naming the child after the day of birth or of any festive occasion was also prevalent among the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal. But at present, excepting in the cases of a few conservative Orāons, almost all of them prefer to have modern Bengali names that are prevalent among the neighbouring castes and communities.

In this connection it may be stated here that a distinct change in the naming pattern of the present-day Orāons of Sunderban may be noticed as compared to the name of the earlier settlers. Previously, when the Orāons practised their original custom of giving names to the child (after their ancestors' name or after the day of birth etc), they used to select the names like *Etwā*, *Budhuā*, *Phāguā*, *Gondru*, *Sukrā*, *Phāgni*, *Budhni*, *Sanichāri*, *Somri* etc. But now-a-days, they have adopted the names (which are generally prevalent among the local Hindu castes) like *Asoke*, *Amar*, *Gopal*, *Dhiren*, *Bejoy*, *Sibdās*, *Mongal*, *Rāmdās*, *Kalyāni*, *Golāpi*, *Mālali*, *Kusum*, *Arati*, *Sephāli* etc., Whereas in Chotā-Nāgpur area the non-Christian Orāons have still retained to a considerable extent their traditional naming pattern. But the Christian Orāons, in lieu of their traditional names, have adopted the Christian names such as *Philip*, *John*, *Marquis*, *David*, *Edward*, *Teresa*, *Matilda*, *Maria*, *Virginia* etc.

E. THE FIRST RICE FEEDING CEREMONY (MUKHE BHAT)

The first rice-giving ceremony for a child is performed by a few Hinduised well-to-do Orāons of the Sunderban area, and the rites performed in this connection are quite similar to those observed by the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities for celebrating the *Annaprāsan* ceremony (formal feeding with rice for the first time). When an Orāon child is about six months old, this ceremony is held on an auspicious day selected with the help of Hindu Brahmins or by consulting 'Pānji' (almanac). Some Orāons even consult the *Gunin* of the village for the purpose.

In the morning of the selected day, the child is given bath,

and *Sasthi Pujā* is held. A few Orāons also perform *Nārāyan Pujā*. Often the male head of the family or sometimes a Hindu Brahmin performs the puja with offerings of various articles e.g. sweets, fruits, *āruā* rice, flowers, milk etc. to *Nārāyan* or Goddess *Sasthi*. On the completion of the puja, the maternal uncle (MoBr) of the child after taking a bath, puts the child in his arms, himself sitting on a *mātiā* (Mat). In front of him, a large plate containing various articles (paddy, *durbā* grass, books, toys, rupee etc), and a cup containing *āruā* rice boiled in milk and sugar known as *pāyes* are kept. The plate is drawn near the child's hand. If the child touches the paddy with its hand, it is believed that he will be a good agriculturist; but if he touches the books, the belief is that the child will be an educated person, and if he touches the rupee he will become a rich man. After this, the maternal uncle of the child takes a little *pāyes* and puts it into the child's mouth. Then he blesses the child with *dhān-durbā* (paddy and *durbā* grass with which blessings are generally made in the Hindu society). After this the child is blessed by other elderly persons of the family. In the absence of a maternal uncle, any male member in the mother's line, and in absence thereof, a male member of the father's line can officiate for the maternal uncle. Sometimes this ceremony is followed by a feast given to relatives and neighbours who come to bless the child. For the sake of convenience and economy, this ceremony is often held along with the name-giving ceremony on the same day. It has been reported by Roy that this ceremony is observed by a few Hinduised Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur plateau also by putting a few grains of boiled rice into the child's mouth when it is six months old, and this is done either by the father or the mother instead of maternal uncle. No other rite is connected with it as is found among the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

F. EAR AND NOSE PIERCING CEREMONIES (KĀN BINDHĀ AND NĀK BINDHĀ)

Among the Orāons of Sunderban, the ear and nose piercing (*Kān-bindhā* and *Nāk-bindhā*) ceremonies are mainly

confined to the girls below ten years of age. Generally, no elaborate ritualistic performances are observed in connection with these two ceremonies. On the fullmoon day of *Māgh* (January-February), when the neighbouring caste Hindus propitiate the Goddess of Learning (*Saraswātī*), the Orāons of this area perform *Kān-Binḍhā* and *Nāk-Binḍhā* ceremonies in individual households. A few Orāons who know *Sādhuaḷi* songs, assemble in the house of the person, where the ceremony is being held, and sing *Sādhuaḷi* songs or utter psalms from the *Pārwaṇ* book throughout the night. On the following day, in the morning, the girl, whose nose and/or ears are to be pierced, is made to sit on the lap of a person who sings *Sādhuaḷi* songs. He, then blows once into the ear of the girl to ward off evils.

Thereafter, the alae of the nose and/or the septum of the nose of the girl are pierced with a fine needle, and a drop of hot mustard oil or luke warm paste of lime and turmeric is applied there. After a few days, a narrow strip of *Nim* wood (*Melia azadirachta*) is inserted through the hole to prevent it from closing down. After two or three days, the peg is taken out, and sometimes nose and/or ear pins are inserted. A feast is generally given in connection with the ceremony, and the persons who sang *Sādhuaḷi* songs are given some remuneration.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, both the ear and the nose piercing ceremonies are prevalent; and when an Orāon girl is about five or six years old, a goldsmith or his wife or some other elderly woman is called to pierce the septum of the nose and/or the lobe of the ear of the girl. A feast generally follows the ear-boring ceremony but not the nose-piercing ceremony.

Among the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities around the Orāons of the Sunderban area, both nose and ear piercing are in practice but these are not associated with any of the rites as are found among the Orāons.

G. PUBERTY RITES

In connection with the puberty rites of the Orāons of

Chotā-Nāgpur, Roy has described the following three main types.

(I) CICATRIZATION

As an indication of manhood, seven or more scars are produced on the arm of a boy of about twelve years of age with the burning wick of a lamp. These scars, known as *Sikā* marks, are given by elderly boys as indication of his being admitted into the bachelor's dormitory (*Dhumkuriā*).

(II) TYING THE HAIR FOR THE FIRST TIME

On the morning following the full-moon day in the month of *Māgh* (January-February), persons belonging to different sexes and age groups assemble either in the house of *Pāhān* (village priest) or *Māhāto* (village headman) for the ceremony of tying the hair of the young boys and girls for the first time. While describing the details of this ceremony, Roy narrates that this ceremony has fallen into disuse (1928: 134)

(III) INITIATION CEREMONIES

At the time of admission into the dormitories, the Orāon boys and girls perform a number of ceremonies which are associated with good many magical rites.

Not all the above puberty rites, as described by Roy (1928: 134-136), as being practised by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, are found among their kinsmen of the Sunderban area, who have neither preserved their old traits connected with puberty rituals nor developed any sort of new puberty rites in this area. The reason for this may be that most of the puberty rites of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur are closely associated with their dormitory system (i.e. *Jonkh-erṣā* for the males and *Pel-erṣā* for the females). But as the immigrant Orāons have never practised the bachelors' dormitory system in Sunderban, the rites and rituals connected with puberty, which are mainly associated with bachelors' dormitory system, have not found any scope for development amongst them. Further, they could not develop any newer type of device for this as the neighbouring castes and communities with whom they are in close contact for generations, generally do not practice any sort of puberty rite.

Further, in many present-day Orāon villages of Ranchi district also due to the virtual disappearance of the dormitory system and also due to the spread of Christianity and puritanistic factors among them, the social utility of these puberty rituals are also gradually diminishing day by day.

H. MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Marriage rituals are observed in detail by the Orāons of Southern Bengal, mainly in connection with the marriages by negotiation (i.e. *Bihā* or *Biye* type, Type-A) which is the norm of the society. In cases of marriage by love (*Bhālobāsā-bihā*), by elopement (*Sindurthāpā*) and by service (*Ghar-jāmāi*), the rituals followed, are almost similar to the negotiation type, but are not so elaborate in nature. In case of re-marriage of a widow or a divorced person (*Sāngā type*), the rituals observed are of a token nature.

In cases of normal marriages, most of these Orāons try to follow the customs and rituals in detail for the sake of social prestige and status, although these have become very expensive now-a-days. The poorer Orāons only, on account of their financial stringency, try to make short-cuts. Further, in order to gain social prestige and status amongst the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities, some Orāons observe certain rituals in connection with marriage, which are quite akin to those followed by local Hindus, and this we may term as *Bihā-B'* type (the description of which is given later on); in this case a Brahmin priest is generally appointed for conducting the ceremonies.

In this connection it may be mentioned that the Christian Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area follow the Christian way of marriage, which takes place at the church. In our discussions, we have kept in view only the marriage system of non-Christian Orāons of that area for comparison and contrast of the marriage customs and rituals as against those of the Sunderban Orāons.

I. BIHĀ OR BIYE—A-TYPE

(A) PRELIMINARY ENQUIRIES

As soon as a boy or a girl grows up to be of marriageable

age, the parents concerned begin looking round for a suitable match. The boy's father usually employs a marriage go-between (*āguā*) or requests his relatives to look for a bride for his son.

The *āguā* i.e. the match-maker (who may be a friend or a relative) generally procures all information regarding suitable girls and conveys that to the boy's father. The following informations about the girl and the family are usually procured by the *āguā*:—

- (i) Age of the girl.
- (ii) Whether she is outside the prohibited degrees or not.
- (iii) Whether she is deformed or is suffering from any diseases.
- (iv) Whether she is efficient in domestic works.
- (v) Number of brothers and sisters of the girl.
- (vi) Economic condition and social status of the father/guardian of the girl.
- (vii) Family history and status etc.

Among the Ranchi Orāons also, the boy's father employs, some comparatively clever friend or relative to act as *āguā* or go-between. He makes enquiries regarding eligible girls, the circumstances of their parents, their family history, the number of their brothers and sisters, the name of their family and clan spirit (*deobhūt*) and particularly whether any woman of the family has been accused of witch-craft (Roy: 1928-142).

(B) FINAL NEGOTIATION

On getting all the information about the girls in view from the *āguā*, the father of the boy, consults his elderly relatives, friends, the *Rājmorāl*, the *Mantri* and some other influential persons about the girls, and afterwards decides which one of these girls, if at all, would be a suitable bride for the boy.

After the preliminary selection, the father of the boy fixes an auspicious day for a trip to the girl's father's house for final enquiries.

On the scheduled day, the boy's father along with other relatives and *Rājmorāl*, *Mantri* and village Panchayet go to the house of the girl's father, accompanied by the *āguā*. As

soon as they reach the girl's father's village, they are received by the members of the girl's family and the members of the Panchayet of that village. In the house of the girl, the boy's father's party are given *hāndiā* (rice-beer) to drink. Then the *āguā* of the boy's party starts discussion about the details of the girl and her family for the confirmation of the visiting party. Thereafter, they come back to their own village after fixing another day for a return visit of the girl's parents for similar confirmation.

On that fixed day, the girl's father with other near relatives and the *Rājmorāl*, *Mantri* and others of the village visits the house of the boy's father for the required information about the boy and his family. If both parties are satisfied on each other's details, a date is fixed for the observance of *Gordhoi* or feet-washing ceremony.

In the Ranchi area, after going through the above procedures, if the father of the boy considers the girl a suitable and eligible match, then the *āguā*, generally after *Karam* festival in *Bhādra* (August), makes the marriage proposal to the girl's father on behalf of the boy's father, and after his consent, exchange of visits between these two parties takes place; and thereby the proposal made by the *āguā* is confirmed.

(C) GORDHOI OR FEET-WASHING CEREMONY

On the appointed day, the boy's partymen go to the house of the bride's father, and are cordially received by all including the family members as well as the villagers. On the courtyard or on the floor of the main room of the house seats are arranged for the visiting party. The younger sister or in absence there-of some collateral sister of the girl along with a few girls, brings water in an earthen pitcher and mustard oil in a small brass cup. At first, she washes the feet of the boy's father, who keeps his feet on a brass plate (*Thāriā*). Then she rubs his feet with a little mustard oil. In the end, she salutes him. Afterwards, she washes the feet of the eldest relatives of the boy, then of the *Rājmorāl* of the groom's village, and thereafter, of other members of the party. Then *hāndiā* is served to the party. Afterwards, at the request to the *āguā* of the boy's

party, the girl is brought before them. She salutes every one, and in return the father of the boy presents her with a rupee or two. After this, the boy's party is given a feast. After the feast, a date is fixed for the *Gordhoi* ceremony for the girl's party at the boy's father's house.

On the fixed day, the bride's father with a few relatives and the village headman and others comes to the groom's father's house, where they are treated in a similar way as in the case of the boy's party. After *Gordhoi*, the boy is brought before the party who salutes everyone. The father of the girl gives him a few coins; after which the party is given a feast.

At the end of this *Gordhoi* ceremony, the two parties sit together to finalise the details of the marriage and also the payment of the bride-price.

Here in this connection, it may be stated that sometimes the *Gordhoi* ceremony takes place on the same date when the final enquiries are made by the parents, and as such no other dates are fixed for the *Gordhoi* ceremony.

The feet-washing ceremony is also prevalent among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur which is known as *Khedḍ-noṛhnā*. The procedure is almost similar as is found among the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

(D) OMENS CONNECTED WITH MARRIAGE

The Orāons believe and observe various omens in connection with marriages. In the Sunderban area, while proceeding for the *Gordhoi* ceremony, if the members of either of the parties happen to see two buffaloes fighting or an empty or broken earthen pitcher or a dead body etc., each of these is regarded as a bad omen, and the marriage is abandoned or at least postponed to a future date. The breakdown of an earthen pitcher during *Gordhoi* ceremony is similarly regarded as a bad omen.

In a similar way, the following happenings are treated as bad omens by the Ranchi Orāons (Roy: 1928: 143-144) also :—

- (i) sound of *dhechuā* (king-crow) cawing.
- (ii) the sight of a fox crossing the path of the party from left to right.

- (iii) the sight of an empty vessel being carried to fetch water just when the party is leaving their village or entering the other village.
- (iv) the sight of cow-dung being carried to the manure-pit or to the field.
- (v) if the lamp which is kept lighted inside the house during dinner, goes out before dinner.
- (vi) if during their stay at home, an earthen vessel gets broken.
- (vii) if a tree or branch of a tree falls down in absence of any high wind.
- (viii) an oil-pot gets over-turned so as to let oil fall on the ground, etc. etc.

On the other hand, among the Orāons of the Sunderban if the members of either party on their way, see any person carrying a load on his head, it is considered to be a good omen for marriage; whereas an Orāon of Chotā-Nāgpur considers a vessel filled with water, some lamp burning, a corpse being carried etc. as good omens.

The different castes and communities of Deltaic Bengal also more or less believe and observe similar types of omen during marriage negotiations.

(E) FIXATION OF BRIDE PRICE, WEDDING ARTICLES (DALI) AND FINAL DATE OF MARRIAGE (LAGAN-BANDHA)

On the appointed day, the boy's party again visits the house of the girl's father, where they are cordially welcomed. The *āguā* of the girl's party, the father of the girl and the *Raj moral* of the village discuss with the father and the relatives of the boy and the headman of the boy's village regarding a suitable date for the actual marriage ceremony and also for the amount of bride price to be paid. Generally, the marriage takes place in the months of Māgh (January-February), Fālgun (February-March) and Baisākh (April-May). Marriage is generally preferred in all the days of the week except *Sonibār* (Saturday), *Rabibār* (Sunday) and *Brihaspati-bār* (Thursday), and also, on the day either party was born and the day of new moon. But the marriage must take place

before the completion of the full-moon of the month. For fixing the wedding date, the village priest is consulted and sometimes the *Pāñji* (almanac) also.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, generally, the odd dates (3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 etc.) are considered to be auspicious; whereas, Thursday, Saturday, and birth days are considered inauspicious. Among many Hindu castes of Sunderban, *Pous* (December-January), *Chaitra* (March-April), *Srāvan* (July-August) and *Āswīn* (September-October) months are generally avoided, and so also birth days, day of new moon, Saturday and Thursday etc.

(F) PAYMENT OF BRIDE PRICE

On the same day, after fixing up the *dāli* and *lagan-bāndhā*, the customary bride-price (Rs. 27.25 including *Rājā-māruā* and *Choukidārī*) is handed over to the father of the girl by the *āguā* of the boy's party on behalf of the boy's father. (If the boy's father on that day is unable to pay the bride price due to some unavoidable reasons, he generally pays it off on the day of marriage). After payment of the bride-price, the guests are given a sumptuous feast of *bhāt* (cooked rice), *dāl* (cooked pulse), vegetable or fish or meat or fowl curry and *hāndiā* (rice beer). In the evening, the father of the boy invites the members of the girl's party to his house on a particular day for the ceremonial feast, and after saluting each other the visitors depart.

Among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area, the boy's father pays the bride price (which varies from Rs. 7 to Rs. 25), on the occasion of *Pūñp-mejhnā* or *Phūl-khūsi*, which takes place during *Kohā-Pāhi* (the big relationship feast) ceremony, the details of which are given in the topic dealing with ceremonial feast.

(G) PRE-MARITAL RITES

With the payment of bride price, the marriage between the two parties is finalised. In between the finalisation of the details and the actual ceremony proper, a few rites are performed by the Orāons of the Sunderban area, which may be termed as pre-marital rites, and are discussed below.

(i) Ceremonial Feast

On the morning of the appointed day, when the members

of the bride's party arrive at the house of the groom's father, they are given a cordial reception. Their feet are washed with water and rubbed with oil in the similar way as is done in *Gordhoi* ceremony. After this, the guests are given seats on the courtyard or on the *Varandah* and are supplied with *biri* (country-made cigarette), hubble-bubble, *Pān-supāri* (betel-leaf and betel-nut) and ceremonial *hāndiā* known as *Bihā-hāndiā*. At first, the father of the girl takes a little quantity of ceremonial *hāndiā* and offers the same to his own ancestors (*Burā-Buri*), to the ancestors of the boy (groom) and lastly to the *Gāon-deoŃ* (village deity). As soon as this rite is finished, all the members of both the parties follow the same procedure. After the completion of the rite of offerings, all of them start drinking this sacramental *hāndiā* regarded as *Prasād* (i.e. offering).

After this the groom salutes (*namaskār*) all the elderly persons assembled for the ceremony.

At noon, a feast is given to the assembled guests generally containing rice and meat curry (of goat, pig or fowl). In the evening, after saluting each other, the bride's party starts for their own village.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, an elaborate type of ceremonial feast known as *Kohā-pāhi*, is held and is regarded as the 'big relationship' feast. On an appointed day, two or more messengers (*āguās*) of the bride's party visit the house of the groom's father. They are served with breakfast and a ceremonial pot of rice-beer known as *Jūrūb-Khittūr-boṛey*, to drink. In the afternoon, friends and relatives of the girl's side arrive, who are also treated with *Khedḍ-noṛhnā* rite. In their presence, two jars of ceremonial liquor known as *Khe'tā-uinā-boṛey* are brought and strained, and of the two, one is handed over to the elders (*Panch*) of the boy's village, and the other, to the elders of the girl's village. Then, from each party, a man of each *gotro* or sib (of bride's as well as bride-groom's) takes up a little liquor in a leaf-cup, and offers *hāndiā* to the ancestral spirits as is done in the Sunderban area. *Pūnṇ-mejhnā* or *Phūl-khūsi* (sticking flowers) is also another rite associated with this ceremony, in which three young men of

the boy's village plant flowers into the hair or over the ear of each guest (first of the girl's side and then of the boy's) and makes obeisance. The next rite, associated with the *Kohā-pāhi* ceremony, is *Bāhi-jorṇā* (i.e. clasping the hands) in which after indulging in mutual jokes and jests, bride price is settled by symbolic display of *bari* (small pulse cakes). "Then the *panches* (elders) rise from their seats, and all embrace one another by clasping one another by the arms and hugging one another to the bosom; and the guardians or *Panches* of the bride and the bridegroom dance, locked in mutual embrace" (Roy: 1928: 151). The next rite, connected with this ceremony, is *Aṭhkha-Kāḍrika* in which symbolic selling and purchasing of tooth-picks and leaves between the two parties take place. After this, payment of the bride-price in actual silver coins along with other articles, is made.

At present, a number of rituals in connection with this ceremony have fallen in disuse, amongst the Orāons.

(ii) *Preparation of Food-stuff and drink specially meant for wedding ceremony.*

The Orāons of Sunderban prepare some food and drink specially meant for marriage ceremony of which some important ones are mentioned below:—

Bihā-Mad—(Rice-beer for marriage)—This is made of boiled rice, and is prepared in the same way as is done in case of preparation of *hāndiā*. But this rice-beer is much stronger than ordinary *hāndiā*, and causes much intoxication.

Pithā (*Sweet-cake*)—It is generally made from a paste of rice-powder, sugar or treacle and water fried on a pan forming small-cakes.

Dom-ruṭi, Māruā ruti or gargarā—These are hand-made breads made of *āttā* (flour) often fried in mustard oil.

All special items for the marriage ceremony are prepared by both the parties one or two days prior to the actual marriage ceremony. In the case of Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons also the same thing happens, about which Roy writes, "a large number of small roundish wedding cakes (*benjā-lāḍḍu*) are prepared by girls in the houses of both parties. These cakes are made

of rice-flour moistened in water, pressed into small balls and boiled in water". (1928: 153)

The various castes and communities living around the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal also prepare various types of special foods during marriage. The special items of food that are prepared by the Orāons are also prepared by them though the preparation of *Mād* is avoided by many of them.

(iii) *Building of Chelnā or Chhāmṛā* (Wedding Booth)

In the morning of the day before the marriage, a *Chelnā* or *Chhāmṛā* i.e. wedding booth is erected on the courtyards of the houses of the bride and bride groom. The *Chelnā* or *Chhāmṛā* is a booth where the marriage takes place. It is a small shed, the roof of which is generally thatched with straw or dried grass, supported by six posts (of which five are of bamboos and one is of *Garan* tree. Of the five bamboo posts, four are planted in four corners, and the fifth one and also the *Garan* pole are posted in the middle. To these posts, bamboo twigs (*Kanchi*), banian (*Ficus bengalensis*) and mango (*Mangifera Indica*) leaves are tied alternately, and at the bottom of each post a straw-rope *Bolān* remains encircled.

In some of the Orāon villages of Ranchi district, similar types of sheds like those of the Orāons of Sunderban, known as *Māṇḍoā* (marriage pandal), are also erected in the courtyards of the houses of both the parties during marriage. Five bamboo posts are fixed in the ground which support a roof made of leaves of *Phutkal* tree.

(iv) *Māruā Pujā*

Prior to the starting of the actual marriage, the boy's father and the girl's father respectively pay homage to the *Gāon-deoti* (village deity) by worshipping in order to get the blessings for the smooth performance of the marriage ceremony. This worship of *Gāon-deoti* is also known among them as *Māruā-pujā*.

The articles required for this *puja* are a red fowl, incense, vermilion, *āruā* rice, lighted lamp, pulses (*Māskalāi*), mustard, powdered *āruā* rice, earthen pot etc. Within a new earthen pot a quantity of turmeric paste, tooth brushes of *Bāblā*

(Acacia) branch, date palm, mustard seeds, mustard oil, *āruā* rice and sweets food (*pithā* and *Māruā-ruti*) are kept. The propitiator sacrifices to the deity the red fowl in the same way as is done in other religious festivities. The *tahari* is prepared with the *āruā* rice and the meat of fowl, which is taken by all the persons belonging to the same *gotro* or sib of the father of the boy or girl as the case may be, after offering it to the deity. The vermilion and turmeric paste used in *Māruā puja*, are specially kept for the use in marriage proper. The objective of this *puja* is the welfare of the partners entering into the marital bond so that their post-marital life becomes full of pleasure and ease, and their conjugal love remains intact life-long. During *Māruā-puja*, songs concerning *Māruā* are generally sung. One of such songs is given below:—

“Bāp Hayato Māroā Chhāday
 Māo Hayato Bari Phāray
 Bhāi O Hayafo Bājna Bāāzy
 Bihār Lāgi Bose Āche, Re.....”
 (Perhaps Father is building Māroā,
 Mother may also bring water,
 Brothers may play at instruments
 He/she is waiting for his/her marriage).

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur perform the *puja* of *Gāon-deoti* of the village on the morning of the wedding day on the *angan* or open space in front of the house of both the boy and the girl. The *Pāhān* (priest) ceremonially pours a little of the rice-beer over the basket and the pitcher, and invokes the *Gāon-deotis* of the village, praying for success in the marriage and a peaceful life of the couple. After drinking, feasting, dancing and singing, this ceremony comes to a close.

(v) *Grām-pujā*

In the afternoon, the *Pāhān* or *Ojhā* (village priest) of the groom's village performs *Grām-pujā* in the village *Thān* (i.e., the seat of the village deities) for propitiating all the village deities, for the welfare and safe return of the groom's party just for starting for the bride's village). The priest,

first of all, makes offerings of *āruā* rice, flowers, fruits, sweets, paddy etc. to the village deities. Next, he offers a fowl to the deities, and promises to sacrifice it after the safe return of the party. Thereafter, the priest puts on the forehead of the groom a mark of the vermilion, used in this *pujā*.

(vi) *Wedding dress of the Groom*

The wedding dress of an Orāon groom in Southern Bengal generally consists of a new *dhuti*, a new shirt and a *chāddar*. At present, an Orāon bridegroom often wears *Pānjābi* (collarless shirt) and puts on sandals or shoes as is done by the bridegroom of the local Hindu castes. He takes bath and combs his hair nicely, and often uses cheap cosmetics just before starting for marriage. The wedding dress for an Orāon groom in the Ranchi area generally consists of a new *dhuti* and a new white shirt, and also a turban for his head.

(vii) *Homage to village Deities and Elders*

Before starting for marriage, the groom accompanied by relatives and friends, visits the village *Thān* for paying homage to the village deities. Thereafter, the groom salutes all the elderly persons and also the *Pāhān*, *Rājmorāl* and elderly members of the village Panchayet. The Orāon groom of Sunderban and also grooms of different Hindu castes and communities around them pay homage to the household as also village deities, and salute the parents and elders before setting out for the marriage.

(viii) *Rites observed in the groom's house before setting out for marriage (Āmku):*

Just before the wedding procession starts, the groom's mother sits on the threshold taking the groom on her lap, and asks, "Where are you going?" The son (groom) answers, "I am going to bring a *Jhi* (maid) for serving you." He then salutes his mother, who kisses him. This rite is quite similar to that of the local Bengalee Hindu castes and communities where a groom before starting for the marriage, takes permission from his mother saying, "Mother, permit me to bring a

Dāsi (maid) for you" (The word *Jhi* originally meant daughter. The meaning has now changed).

In this connection, it may be stated here that this particular rite is observed mostly by the Hinduised Orāons of Sunderban, and particularly in those villages where their number is insignificant in comparison with the Mundas, who follow it in detail.

This rite is neither observed by the Orāons nor by the Mundas of Chotā-Nāgpur, and this is obviously a local development imbibed from the local Hindu castes and communities.

The assembled women, in the mean time, amuse themselves by reciting funny couplets or songs. An example thereof is given below:—

Uparete Chānd Suruj
Niche Tātā Bāli Mor
Gourhari Ghāme Bhijatou
Choṭo Sāri Mor
Gourhari.....

(The Moon and the Sun are up in the sky. The sand beneath the feet is very hot, Gourhari perspires much. My little *Sāri* is also wet with sweat).

(ix) *Wedding Procession*

The wedding procession from the house of the groom starts for the village of the bride in the afternoon. The procession generally consists of the groom, his father and relatives, his friends, the members of the village Panchayet including the *Rājmorāl* and the *Mantri* and a few prominent persons of neighbouring villages.

The groom keeps quite close to him a friend or a relative (younger brother or sister's husband or others) as his best man (known locally as *Ludki*). This custom appears to have been borrowed from the local Hindu inhabitants whose bridegrooms are accompanied by a *Nitbar*.

The *āguā* leads the party, and the village drummers accompany it, playing at their drums and flutes, and the younger members of the procession sing to the tune of the music, various funny songs, an example of which is given below:—

Sat—pat Ke Phele
 Châte Ke Tarkāri Lo,
 Châte Ke Tarkāri,
 Bāngālā Des Kā Nāri,
 Nāche Kā Sundari Lo,
 Nāche Kā Sundari.

(Get up leaving delicious curries. Lo, the beautiful girl of Bengal is dancing).

The groom, accompanied by the party, goes on foot, and the *āguā* and a few other elderly relatives carry the *dāli*, (articles for presentation) which contains the following :—

- (1) *Sāri*—5 (for the mother and other female relatives of the bride).
- (2) *Sāri*—1 (for the bride, known as *Bihā-Sāri*).
- (3) *Dhuti*—1 (for the youngest brother-in-law known as *Sārā-dhuti*).
- (4) Paddy and *Durbā* grass.
- (5) Mustard seeds.
- (6) Dry rhizomes of turmeric.
- (7) Paste of turmeric used in *Māruā puja*.
- (8) Vermilion used in *Māruā puja* kept in a vermilion box.
- (9) Wedding cakes (*Pithā* and *Maruā ruti*).
- (10) A few jars of rice-beer (five or more in number).

If the groom's father fails to give the bride price beforehand, he takes Rs. 25/- as bride price, Rs. 2/- as *Rājā-māruā* and Re 0.25 as *Choukidāri* along with the *dāli*. At present, a few enlightened and rich Orāons also take for their daughter-in-law some ornaments of (glass beads and silver) and some cosmetics.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, the marital procession includes male and female relatives, and the bridegroom generally goes on foot, but in certain cases, he rides on a pony. The groom generally carries with him a sword or a knife or sometimes only an iron-shod stick in his hand for scaring away the evil spirits. Village drummers also accompany the party. The party-members also take with them the food-stuff for one meal and a few jars of ceremonial liquor as they do not take

food at bride's parent's house till the matrimonial ceremony is over.

The party also carries almost similar types of articles like those of the Orāons of the Sunderban area for the bride and her relatives.

The Hinduised Orāons of Rānchi district, on their way to the bride's village, halt under a mango tree, on the border of the village. The groom and a married man move round the trunk of the tree thrice, tying a loop of unbleached cotton thread each time, and marking the same with vermilion and with the paste of rice-flour and water. But this rite is not observed by the Orāons of Sunderban.

Some of the Hindu castes and communities of Deltaic Bengal also carry with them various articles such as *Sāri*, dhuti, sweets, ornaments, turmeric paste etc. for the bride and the bride's relatives. The party generally consists of relatives and friends, and is often accompanied by drummers.

(x) *Observances at the Bride's village.*

(1) Welcome of the wedding party: When the sound of the drums of the groom's party is heard, they become agog with pleasure and excitement. The youngsters start singing, making queries about the music—

“Mā Go Mā Nadir Dhāre
Kiser Bājñā Bājiche” ?

(O Mother! what is this music at the river side?).
and the elders (generally women) reply through music,—

“Hāre Hāre Kāl Bādari,
Hāre Hāre Megh Bādari,
Re——

Rājār Betā Bihā Karite Āsichhe
Tāri Bājñā Bājichhe,
Tāri Sājñā Sājichhe
Hud Pani Dhud
Karāa Re——”

(Look, the black cloud is bringing the rain. The Prince is coming to marry. It is the music of the wedding party of the Prince for which the whole thing has been decorated, and the rain has made the ponds' water milky.)

When the groom's party reaches the bride's village, it is given a cordial reception by the bride's relatives, villagers, village officials and village drummers. They are then led to the bride's father's house with loud rejoicing, where they are accommodated for the night in a separate room. The groom salutes the elderly members of the bride's family. Next morning the actual marriage ceremony commences.

In connection with the reception of the groom's party of Chotā-Nāpur Orāons, Roy says, "On their arrival at the outskirts of the bride's village, the bride's people and their friends and relatives approach them in a body as if to attack or repulse the bridegroom and his party. Men and women of both sides sing indecent and abusive songs accompanied by dances ; and young men on both sides, who carry sticks and clubs, whirl them in a mock-attack on the other side "(1928 : 156). Roy has also remarked that formerly this custom was something more than a mock fight. After the initial welcome, an old woman of the bride's party comes before the guests and sprinkles water by means of a mango twig with leaves from a brass jug in order to ward off evil spirits.

But this custom is not at all prevalent among the Orāons of the Sunderban area. Among the neighbouring Hindu people of this tract, and even in good many present-day Orāon villages of Ranchi district, the groom's party is only received with music and rejoicing without the show of mock fighting.

(2) Marriage proper—Preparation: In the next morning the groom and other members of his party start making preparatory arrangement for the marriage. The groom wears his dress, and becomes ready for marriage. At the same time, the relatives of the bride make all arrangements for the marriage, and a few women (not widows) start dressing the *Kanyā* (bride).

Dress of the bride: The bride generally wears a new coloured *sāri* (*Bihā-sāri*, brought by the groom's party). At present, coloured blouse and a *sāyā* (petti-coat) are also preferred. She wears ornaments on different parts of her body, and her companions comb her hair neatly and make coiffure. At present, they also use different cosmetics such as powder,

snow etc. The *sāri* is worn by the bride in the same way as is done by a Bengalee Hindu girl of the locality. But the bride of the Orāon society in Ranchi wears a two-piece dress, one for the lower part of the body and the other covering the upper part. Different ornaments are also worn by the bride there.

Painting of Vermilion (Sindur-dān): When the companions have finished the dressing of the bride, she is brought before the groom, who stands on the floor of the main hut. They are now encircled by a piece of white cloth, brought by the bride's party inside which the groom puts, with the tip of his left little finger, a vermilion mark on the bride's forehead and also on the parting line of her hair, using same vermilion that was employed in the *Māruā puṣā*. In a similar way, the bride also puts mark of *Kājal* or vermilion on the groom's forehead, the female relatives assisting in the process. The cloth covering is then removed, and the groom and the bride are then taken inside the main room, and made to sit on a new date-palm leaf mat, while the youngsters play at their musical instruments and the elderly women sing marriage songs of the type given below:—

Pukhure To Jal Nāi Mā
Phutilo Sāluker Phul.
Sei Phule Ho Ā Khou Bihā

(The tank water has dried up, yet in the water lily has bloomed, Mother. This flower will be used for the marriage).

This custom of applying vermilion, known as *Isūng-sindri* as a part of marital rite, is also prevalent among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāpur plateau. At first vermilion pots are exchanged between the bride and the groom. Thereafter the groom and the bride put vermilion marks on each other's forehead and temple with the help of their female relatives. At this time, the musicians play at their instruments and young men and women sing songs. A typical song as reported by S. C. Roy (1928: 159) is given below:—

Khoiondrkā kānnān,
Hiā bhāiyāre sendrā ṭonkā,

Chitrā mākān lāoāge,
 Hoā bhāiyāre sendrā ṭonkā.
 (The arrow by the son's bride brought,
 Do take it to the hunting-ground!
 To kill the striped deer, brother,
 Do take it to the hunting-ground!).

Among the Hindu inhabitants of Sunderban, as also of other areas, the practice of this custom (*Sindur-dān*) forms a vital part in marriage ceremony, and this also is the case with the Orāons of both Ranchi and Sunderban.

In connection with the Orāon marriage of Chotā-Nāgpur, Roy reports another rite, known as *Gundāri-dhūknā*, which takes place just after the painting of vermilion, and in which *isūm-sindri jhārā* or ceremonial rice-beer is given to those who assisted the vermilion painting.

Ceremonial pasting of turmeric: After the vermilion marking is over, the elder sister of the bride brings near the couple, some turmeric rhizomes and grinding stones, and makes a turmeric paste sitting on the lap of the groom, and keeps a part of it in a new earthen pitcher. The mouth of the pitcher is covered with a new *dhuti* known as *Sārā-dhuti* (which was brought by the groom's party). Along with turmeric paste, the pitcher also contains mustard seeds, three rhizomes of turmeric, two for the groom's party and the remaining one for the bride's party. The pitcher also contains *āruā* rice, green *durbā* grass (*cynodon dactylon*), paddy etc.

In connection with the Orāon marriage of the Chotā-Nāgpur area, this custom has not been mentioned by Roy or any other authors.

Ceremonial cutting and bringing of water (Duldā-pāni): After the pasting of the turmeric, the elder sister of the bride goes out to bring water in two earthen pitchers (*kalsi*), tying each other's necks with a white cotton thread, and carrying them to three ponds one after another. With this water, the couple would be given bath later.

She is followed by her younger brother (who is even younger than the bride), who takes a scythe (*Hānsuā*) with him to protect symbolically the water, from the evil spirits etc.

Reaching the pond, the brother cuts the water of the pond symbolically with the scythe thrice, and the elder sister of the bride partly fills the pitcher with water from that spot. In the same way, the boy cuts the water of other two ponds, and she takes water from these ponds also. When the pitchers are filled up with the water of the three ponds, he cuts the water of both the pitchers again by twisting his hand round his back.

The belief behind the cutting of water with an iron implement is that the evil spirits will not be able to do any harm to the water; in the similar way the groom and the bride also would be protected from the influence of evil spirits, caused through this water, when they will bathe with this water. As soon as the cutting of water is finished, the mouths of the pitchers are covered with that *Sārā-dhūtī*. She, then, carries the pitcher on her head to the marriage booth or *Chelnā* built on the courtyard. The bride's younger brother, who acts as the protector, gets the *Sārā-dhūtī*, used for covering the pitcher.

This rite is also not observed among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur.

Smearing of turmeric paste : As soon as she stands on the *Chelnā*, it is covered on all four sides by means of *Chetā* or mat made of bamboo splits, so that, no one can see the pitchers and throw evil eye on it. Then the *Ludki* (i.e. the best man) takes the groom, and the elder sister of the bride takes the bride on their laps respectively and paint them with turmeric paste, after which the couple circles round on the *Chelnā* thrice, the bride clockwise, the groom anticlockwise. When this goes on, one of the members places the grinding stone (by which the turmeric was pasted) on the floor of the *Chelnā* on which the bride stands, and behind her the groom. All the feet of the couple must be on the grinding stone. The groom then presses the heel of the bride with his toes, with the bride's left heel inserted into the cleft between the great-toe and the second toe of his left foot as a fork.

Outside the covered *Chelnā*, the *Gunin* or *Mati*, (village medicine man) moves round for three times, throwing magically charmed mustard seeds at them uttering incantations, so that

no evil can do harm to this couple. This rite is known as *Sarse-parā*. After [his, the girl turns towards the boy, and the boy puts vermilion marks on her forehead and parting of her hair.

The girl also does the same either with vermilion or with *Kājal*. Thereafter, the elder sister of the bride (who brought the pitchers of water) pours on the heads of the couple the water which she brought during *Duldā-pāni* rite.

When this ceremonial rite is over, the couple is taken for bath by the women folk of the bride's house. After bath, they put on clothes and visit the house of one of the bride's relatives to have their lunch.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, these rites are observed in a slightly different form. In this case two or more men of the bride's side carry the bridegroom on their arms inside the bride's house. After having their feet washed, the bride and the bride-groom stand on a curry stone under which three or five bundles of thatching-grass and a yoke are kept. The bridegroom stands behind the bride, pressing the left heel of the bride by the toe of his left foot. During the performance of this ceremony, they are covered by means of screens from fear of evil spirits. Sometimes, they are anointed with turmeric paste. After this, both the bride and the bridegroom are bathed in water, which the unmarried girls bring from spring or pond. While the couple are having bath, a few female relatives of bride's party rub the head of the groom. "The bride-groom then puts a mark of vermilion diluted in oil on the fore-head of the bride with ring-finger of his left hand and the bride similarly marks the forehead of the bridegroom" (Roy: 1928: 158). After bath, the couple change their cloth, and go to their respective quarters.

In this connection, it may be said that in Chotā-Nāpur this rite is observed prior to the rite *Isūng-sindri*, but in the Sunderban area, it is done after *Sindur-dān*.

Propounding Riddles: In Chotā-Nāgpur the Orāons perform *Khiri-tengnā* i.e. propounding riddles, which takes place after the *Isūng-sindri*. In this rite, "a woman of bride's party takes up one leaf-cup after another with two reeds to serve as

a pair of tongs, fills each cup with rice-beer, carries the cup with the pair of reeds used as tongs, first to the lips of the bride-groom, then to the lips of the bride (who are however not to drink a drop of the liquor) and finally throws it on to the roof of the hut." (Roy : 1928 : 161-162). This rice-beer is known as *Khiri-tengnā-boṛey* (riddle-propounding rice-beer). Then an old man or an old woman addresses the couple with a riddle three times.

But among the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal, this rite is absent, though sometimes an old man or a woman is seen to jest with the couple or utters riddles. Among some of the Hindu castes and communities of the area, the barber, during marriage, utters riddles or abuses the evil doers.

Presentation of the couple to the relatives and the neighbours. (Savā): In the afternoon, the couple is brought to the house of the bride's father, where they are seated on a mat on the *Ghelnā*, and the relatives, friends, villagers and others come to meet the couple, and a few persons, who are comparatively richer and have higher social position among them, give presents in order to display and maintain their social status. In the evening, the guests are given a sumptuous feast of rice, curry, meat, *dāl* (pulse), sweets and rice-beer, after which, the female folk of the household arranges for feeding the couple.

After *Khiri-tengnā* rite, the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur perform another rite known as *Sabhā-Sindri*, in which the couple sits on the marriage platform (*Māṇḍoā*), and the relatives of the couple put vermilion marks on their foreheads.

Taking dinner together (Bihā-Khānā): When the *Savā* is over, the couple is taken inside a room decorated for the purpose, where they spend a while, gossiping and joking with the relatives of both the parties. With the onset of *Sānjh* (evening) or at *rāt* (night), an elderly woman brings in a plate some rice, curry etc., and keeps it before the couple, from which both of them take a little of each of the items, while the ladies around go on singing.

"Jatā Din Bhāi-er Ghare,
Tata din Alo Jwalito je
Ebār Phālñi Āndher Holo je"

[So long you were in your brother's house, the house remained lighted. Now, oh Phalni (name of the bride)! when you are leaving (your's brother's house), the house is steeped in darkness].

After the dinner, the couple passes that night in that room.

In connection with "the dining-together rite" of the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons, Roy has described that the dinner (*Mandi-ona*) of the couple consists of rice and curry made of *Chhiddā* or *baris*, which are small cakes or *urid* pulse (*Phaseolus Roxburghii*) and cucumber. Thereafter, "the bride's parents hand over to her an arrow which she has to carry till her arrival at her husband's house. This is meant to ward off the evil eye and to scare away any spirits that might seek to, follow her or harm her on the way". (Roy : 1928 : 165). But the above mentioned custom is not prevalent among the Orāons of the Sunderban area. On the other hand, local Bengalee customs and procedures seem to have been well imbibed by them.

(3) *Starting for groom's house* : Next morning, after breakfast, the couple makes arrangement for leaving the bride's house. At the time of leaving the house, the mother of the bride sits on the door-way taking her daughter on her lap. The bride keeps a handful of paddy, and is asked by her mother, whose house are you going to fill". The daughter answers, 'Oh, my brother's'. Then she throws the paddy over her head behind within the room, where her mother's mother of father's brother's wife collects the paddy, and ties that in one corner of the bride's sari.

After this, the couple salutes elderly persons, who in return bless them with *Dhān durbā* (paddy and green durba grass).

Afterwards, the groom's party along with the couple, starts for their village escorted by a number of people of the bride's house and the village drummers. The female relatives of the bride sing songs with tears in their eyes.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, the couple starts for bride-groom's village after *Sabhā-Sindri* rite. "For the first

and last time the elder brother of the bride-groom may touch the new bride now ; he usually carries her in his arms a short distance and then female relatives carry her, turn by turn, to some further distance". (Roy: 1928: 165). In this connection, Roy has also narrated about a peculiar custom, which has now-a-days almost fallen into disuse. The custom was that when the bride was being carried to her husband's house, the people of her party start a mock rescue operation, to get her back and run away with her. She will again be recaptured by her husband's people, and this is repeated a number of times.

This custom of mock fight is totally absent among the Orāons of the Sunderban area. The mock fight at the beginning and the mock rescue at the end appear to be reminiscent of an older custom of marriage by capture prevalent among them.

Among the Hindu castes and communities around the Orāons of Sunderban, the normal custom prevalent before starting for the groom's house after marriage is the saluting of all the elderly persons receive their blessings with '*Dhān-durbā*'.

(h) *Post marital rites at bride groom's village :*

As soon as the groom's party arrives at their own village, they are given a hearty welcome by the villagers. First of all the bride and the groom are led to the 'Thān', to pay homage to the deities, wherefrom they return to the house of the groom's father pay homage to the family deities (if any), salute the parents of the groom and other elderly members of the family. Then they are taken into a room decorated for this purpose. At the entrance of the room, the younger brother or brothers and sister or sisters of the bridegroom stand, and do not permit the couple to enter the room, until and unless they are given a few copper coins by the bridegroom. This money, they generally utilise in merrymaking. Inside the room seats are given to the couple.

The neighbouring Hindu castes and communities living around the Orāons of Southern Bengal have similar practices in a slightly different form.

Among the Ranchi Orāons, in addition to the above men-

tioned rites, a few more are also observed. On reaching his house, the bride-groom walks behind the bride pressing her heel with his toe; and both place their feet together on baskets, one after another, till they reach the room. These baskets are arranged before the couple at the time of entering the courtyard by the female relatives of the groom.

When the newly wed couple of the caste Hindus of this area of Sunderban reaches the groom's house, they stand on a plate containing a solution of water, powdered-rice and *āltā* (red-paint), and they enter the room meant for them, through a passage decorated with *ālpanā* (i.e. floor-decorations made by a solution of rice-floor and water). This rite varies from the rite practised by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur during entering into the room i.e. walking over the baskets.

First bath and meal: After taking rest for sometime, the bride and the groom are taken by a number of groom's female relatives to a nearby pond or canal wherefrom the bride brings one pitcher of water, and the groom two, to the courtyard of the house. The water is sanctified there by means of *Tulsi-jal* (water in which sacred Basil leaves are dipped) and they are given bath with this water. After bathing and changing clothes, they are taken inside a room, where they sit separately on two seats, and one of the groom's female relatives (ElBrWi/FaSi/FaBrWi) brings in a brass plate containing cooked rice (*bhāt*), cooked pulse (*dāl*), vegetable curry (*tarkāri*) etc. At first the bride-groom takes from the plate a little of each of the items for three times after which the bride also takes the same things thrice from the same plate. Then they are supplied with a full course of lunch.

Among the Orāons of, Ranchi district, similar types of rites are also practised, but with some modifications, and also along with some additional rites. Here when a married couple goes to the spring to bring water, the bride has to put three vermilion marks mixed in oil at the mouth of the spring on wood or stone marking the spring. Formerly, another rite was also prevalent among these Orāons. The bridegroom, on this occasion, used to rub the head of the bride with red earth, and clean and wash it, and the bride also used to do the same

- to the bride-groom. But this custom, at present, has totally fallen into disuse. Further, at present, when the couple is given first lunch, the bride will not touch it until and unless she is given some money.

Presentation of the couple to the Relatives, Friends and Villagers (Savā): In the afternoon, the couple sits on a mat in the *Chelnā*, and the relatives, friends of the groom and the villagers come to see them. Some of the visitors also bring presents with them for the couple, who in their turn salute them.

This custom of presenting the couple before the gathering is not in vogue among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur area. But this is practised by the Hindus of Deltaic Bengal.

First Cooking of Rice and Ceremonial Feast (Bou bhāt): After the presentation of the bride to the assembled guests, elaborate feast is given. The first item of the feast is one which has been cooked by the new bride according to her choice. She generally prefers to prepare *Pāyes* (āruā-rice boiled in milk and sweetened) or *Bhāt* (cooked rice). This item only is served by the bride herself to all the guests, and the other items are served by the groom's relatives.

Acceptance of the first item cooked and served by the bride is regarded as an indication that the society has unreservedly accepted her as member of the village community.

Roy did not mention anything about this rite while reporting about the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur and even to this day, this is not practised by the Orāons (both Christian and non-Christian sections). This rite is not simply prevalent among the Orāons only of the Sunderban area but is a widely practised custom among all the Hindu castes and communities all over Bengal, and this has obviously been borrowed by the Orāons of this area from the neighbouring Hindus around them.

Taking back the bride (Phiruni-neyā): In the next evening, a few members of the bride's family come to the house of the bride-groom to take the bride back (*Phiruni-neyā*) to her father's place. After washing the feet of these people, they are given some presents, and are sumptuously fed. After passing the night in the house and finishing

breakfast in the next morning, they take back the couple, or sometimes only the bride to their village. None from the groom's family accompanies them. The bride takes with her a few jars of *hāndiā* and sweets, as presents from her husband's house

In Chotā-Nāgpur area, after a day or two, a number of female relatives of the bride come to the bride-groom's house to take her back to her parent's house. After feet washing they are treated with a sumptuous feast after which they take the bride back to their village. The bride-groom, accompanied by a few of his relatives, often follow them on their request. Sometimes, he is taken later on. This rite of taking back the bride is known as *Erā-kirtānā* and *Bāhārāñt*. When the bride goes to the house of her father with a pot of rice beer as a present from her husband's house, "it is believed that unless this present of *jhārā gūṇḍā*, as it is called, is sent with the girl, she will become barren, or, even if she has any issue, the children will be sickly and will otherwise suffer pain or some other trouble". (Roy : 1928 : 168). But this type of belief is non-existent among the present day Orāons of Sunderban as well as Chotā-Nāgpur area, though an Orāon bride takes *hāndiā* as present from her husband's house to her father's house.

(i) *Post-Marital rites observed at the bride's house.*

Bheloā-phāri ceremony and dismantling of Chelnā at bride's father's house: The party that returns with the bride, is cordially received by the family members and relatives of the bride as also by the villagers. Then the *Ojhā* performs the *Bheloā phāri* ceremony (in the same way as described in the chapter dealing with Magico-Religious Beliefs and Practices) after which the *Chelnā* is dismantled on the courtyard. The girl stays for a few days at her father's house, but the groom may or may not stay on.

In Chotā-Nāgpur area, the *Dāṇḍā-kāṭṭā* (*Bheloā-phāri*) ceremony is held on the day of arrival of the couple at the bridegroom's house for the first time i.e. before the performance of First Bath and Meal rite.

(j) *Second Phase of the Post-marital Rites observed at Bride-groom's father's house*

Bheloā-phāri ceremony and dismantling of Chelnā at groom's house:

After some days, a few people from groom's house go to bring back the bride from her father's house, and are cordially received by the members and relatives of the bride's family. After feet-washing, they are treated with presents and given a good feast. Before starting for her father-in-law's house, the bride is given some leaves of Basil, Mango, Durba-grass and paddy in the brass plate which she hands over to her mother who keeps it carefully for a few days.

With the party, a few jars of *hāndiā* and some sweets are given, on behalf of the girl's family. When the bride starts from her father's house for her husband's she, along with some of her female relatives, sings :

Ām Pātā Chikan Chādan

Tulsir Pātā Hariā

Mago, Tulsir Pātā Rākhibe

Jatane,

Hāme Jābo Go Sasurbāri.

[The leaf of Mango tree is narrow but the leaf of Basil tree is sacred. Mother, keep the Basil leaf with care, (as) I am going to my father-in-law's house].

On their arrival at the bride groom's village, the *Ojhā* performs the *Bheloā-phāri* at the groom's house, after which the *Chelnā* is dismantled.

Grām Pujā—When all the marital rites are over, the *Ojhā* or *Pāhān* (priest) of bride-groom's village again performs the *Grāmpujā* in the village, sacrificing the fowl that was previously vowed and offered.

With the completion of the *Grāmpujā*, the marriage ceremony comes to an end.

The *āguās* of both the parties are thereafter paid off their remunerations.

II. BIHĀ—TYPE B

A few Orāons of the Sunderban area, who have been

practices almost in the same way as the local Hindus, eliminating many of the Orāon customs and practices, not found amongst the local Hindu castes and communities. These people requisition the services of Hindu Brahmin (a Hindu priest) for conducting the marriage rites as are done by the Hindu castes, and the priest is paid in cash and kind according to their capacity.

(A) NEGOTIATION, ARRANGEMENTS ETC.

The preliminary arrangements for selection of the bride and the bridegroom etc. in this type of marriage are practically similar to that of the Marriage—Type-A described earlier, but the procedure has been greatly simplified in form. Like the local Hindus, the final selection is sealed with *Āshirbād* in the form of a piece of ornament or a few silver coins presented to the bride by the groom's father or his representative; and in a similar way the representative of the bride's party comes over to the groom's house for *Āshirbād*, presenting the groom with clothes or rings or money etc.; the question of dowry is also settled as also the date of the actual marriage ceremony.

(B) PRE-MARITAL RITES

So far as pre-marital rites are concerned, these have also been simplified in this type of marriage. The bride is taken to a source of water and given bath with the accompaniment of conchshell blowing and sound of 'Ulu' 'Ulu' from the tongues of females accompanying her. After bath, she is given a new red-bordered *sāri* to wear.

At the groom's house in the morning of the wedding day, worshipping of ancestors is performed by the Hindu Brahmin priest (without any form of sacrifice or offering of *hāndiā* as done by the orthodox Orāons.).

After the worship of the ancestors, the ceremony of turmeric paste application (*Gāye-halud*) in a rather simple form is done at the groom's house, when turmeric paste is annointed on the groom's body. A part of the same paste is sent to the bride's house for application on her body.

Regarding the marital procession, there is hardly any difference between the two types of marriages.

(C) MARRIAGE PROPER

So far as the marriage rites proper are concerned, these are conducted by a Hindu Brahmin priest almost in the same way as is done in other Hindu houses. A *Yajñā* is performed, and the girl is ceremonially handed over to the groom by the bride's father ('*Sampradān*'), while the priest is chanting *mantras* (sacred hymns). Just before this, the bride is made to circle round the groom seven times, and the ceremony of *Shuvaḍristi* (sacred gaze) is performed under cover of a piece of cloth, during which the groom and the bride have their first look at each other. Application of vermilion (*Sindurḍān*) is done thereafter.

After the marriage and dinner, the bride and the groom are taken to a specially decorated room (*Bāsar ghar*) where young friends and young relatives of the bride cut jokes and sing various songs.

(D) POST-MARITAL RITES

Post-marital rites are also simpler in form. In the next morning *Bāsi-bihā* ceremony takes place, when the Brahmin priest performs some rituals. After *Bāsi bihā* and midday meal, the bride-groom starts for his own house with his bride.

When the party returns to the groom's house with the bride, they are formally received (*Baran*) by the relatives of the bridegroom. The couple are made to stand on a plate containing a solution of powdered rice, water and red paint. The bride stands in front of the bridegroom holding a live fish. Then they are ceremonially led by elderly women into a room, where they salute all the elderly persons who bless them.

The night of this day is termed as *Kāl-Rātri* on which the bride and the groom must not meet or see each other till the night is over.

Next day, the presentation of the bride to the relatives and the neighbours takes place, which is followed by a feast similar to Type-A marriage. On the night, the groom and the

bride ceremonially meet each other for the first time in a specially arranged room, where they pass the night on (*Phul Sajyā*), a bedstead decorated with flowers.

On the eighth day after marriage, the groom and the bride visit the bride's father's house and return after a few days.

These customs as practised by the few Hinduised Orāons are practically similar to those of the Hindu castes and done in rather simple and superficial form.

III. OTHER TYPES OF MARRIAGES

(A) LOVE MARRIAGE (BHALOBASA-BIHA)

When a boy and a girl fall in love with each other, and decide to marry, the boy conveys his decision to his father through some relatives or friends. The father employs an *āguā* for bringing all necessary information about the girl and her family, and after considering all the factors if the fathers of both the parties agree to this proposal then the marriage is settled following the procedures as described in Type A marriage. The marriage rites observed in this type of marriage are quite similar to that of the negotiation type of marriage. If the guardian of either party does not agree to this type of marriage, the couple sometimes run away from the village and marries. Generally, if the boy and the girl do not belong to the same sib, and if either of them was not married earlier, then the parents generally do not stand in the way of their marriage. This type of marriage is also prevalent among the Rānchi Orāons as also among the Hindu inhabitants of South Bengal.

(B) MARRIAGE BY FORCE

Force, as a means of procuring a bride, is generally adopted by those young Orāons, who are not quite sure whether the girls of their choice would like to marry them. The person concerned generally waits for a suitable opportunity, and as soon as that arrives, he applies forcefully the mark of vermilion on the forehead of the girl, and runs away from the spot

in order to get rid of the beatings etc. from the girl's relatives.

This procedure is generally adopted by a young man, when he finds the girl of her choice at a lonely place, outside the village, and he is often helped in this matter by his friends.

As soon as the girl's father gets the news of the incident, he lodges a protest with the *Rājmorāl* of the village. On a scheduled day, during the session of the Panchayet, both the parties are invited, and hearings are held regarding the case. Generally, the father of the boy is heavily fined for the misbehaviour of his son.

After the payment of the fine and after some formal negotiations between the parties, the marriage is settled between the boy and the girl, provided there is no marital bar between the parties.

At present the incidence of occurrence of this type of marriage among the Orāons of the Sunderban area is insignificant in number, and the marital rites observed in this type of marriage, are also simplified to a considerable extent.

(C) MARRIAGE BY SERVICE (GHARJAMAI SYSTEM)

This type of marriage generally takes place when a well-to-do Orāon has no son but a daughter only or when the man is sufficiently old and has a grown-up daughter with minor children. In such cases, the persons concerned try to seek *Gharjāmāi* (who is generally a poor Orāon or come from a poor family) to get their help in agricultural as well as in other socio-economic pursuits. The marriage expenses are generally borne by the girl's father, and no bride-price is demanded, and in return the bride-groom serves his would-be father-in-law for a period varying from six months to two years. The marriage proper generally takes place after the end of this service period, and before the marriage, the boy and the girl are not allowed to establish any sort of sexual relation etc. with each other.

After the end of the service period, if the girl's father does not want to give his daughter to the hands of his proposed son-in-law due to some reasons, then the man concerned has full right to claim restitution for the service that he rendered to the father of the girl during the period.

After the marriage, the couple may live in the house of the bride's father life-long or may start a separate establishment near the bride's father's house.

The marital rites observed in this type of marriage, are less elaborate and less expensive than in the negotiation type of marriage.

It may be mentioned here that like some members of the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities, sometimes an Orāon is seen living with his father-in-law after marriage (here he does not have to render service before marriage). Generally those Orāons who are quite well-to-do and who have no sons but a daughter only, prefer to have this type of son-in-law. This second type of marriage is also known among them as *Gharjāmāi*.

The above types of marriage, are also found among the Orāons of Ranchi area.

(D) POLYGyny

The Orāons of Sunderban practise polygyny to a very limited extent, and this is mainly confined to a few persons of wealth and status. The present-day tendency among them is for monogamous type of marriage. In the polygynous type of marriage, rituals are followed in detail only during the first marriage as in the case of negotiation type of marriage described earlier. But in subsequent marriages, the rituals observed are less elaborate and curtailed and modified to a great extent. Further, the bride price demanded for the subsequent marriages are also much higher than in the first marriage. Both sororal and non-sororal polygyny having a single hut meant for all the wives, are generally the characteristics of this type of marriage.

This type is also prevalent among a few Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur.

(E) DIVORCE (CHHARĪ)

Divorce, known as *Chhārī*, is permissible among the Orāons of the Sunderban area on the grounds of loose character, debauchery, quarrelsome habit, sterility etc. on the part of either of the parties.

When a husband or wife is unwilling to stay with each other, the relatives of both the parties first of all try to settle the matter amicably, and if that does not succeed the party concerned appeals to the village Panchayet for divorce. On a particular day, the village Panchayet sits for deciding the matter, where both the parties (in case of wife, her father or some one of father's family) are requested to be present. The Panchayet after going through the arguments of the parties, try to settle the case amicably but if that fails, the party concerned is given permission to divorce.

Divorce is also permissible among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area. No special ceremonies or formalities are observed for effecting a divorce. Roy describes the following points (1928 : 171) on which the divorce is allowed :—

- (1) that the wife is a *lāñḍi* or run-away;
- (2) that she is a *kuṛiā* or habitual idler and neglects her household duties, or cannot perform them properly);
- (3) that she is a *chūrni*, or thief;
- (4) that she possesses the evil eye (*najar*) or is a witch (*ḍāin*);
- (5) that she has brought sickness or misfortune and ill-luck to her husband's family;
- (7) that the wife is barren, or the husband is impotent;
- (8) that either the husband or the wife is a lunatic;
- (9) that either the husband or the wife has been converted into Christianity, and
- (10) confirmed bad temper and frequent quarrels between husband and wife.

In Sunderban tract, due to the influence of neighbouring Hindu inhabitants, the Orāon husbands and wives do not normally think of divorce as they believe like the local Hindus that the marital union they establish, is a divine bond, and should not be broken by these earthly factors.

(F) REMARRIAGE OF A WIDOWED OR A DIVORCED PERSON (SANGA)

A widowed or a divorced person in Orāon society of Sunderban is permitted to marry again, even if he/she has children by previous wife/husband. Normally such persons seek partners, who are either divorced or widowed, though sometimes they

are marrying unmarried persons by paying a higher bride price than in cases of normal marriages. Rituals are not observed in detail in this type of marriage. Here a groom one morning goes to the house of the selected bride accompanied only by widowed persons. In the main room of the bride's house, both the bride and the groom are given seats and both of them paint each other with turmeric paste; after which they take bath and dress in new clothes. A feast is given later on to the assembled guests. The most characteristic feature of this type of marriage is that the vermilion is not used here as done in other cases.

In the *Sāṅgā* type of marriage only, the widows and widowers are allowed to witness the marriage, unmarried persons being strictly forbidden from attending this ceremony.

Among the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities of the Sunderban area usually belonging to backward classes, these types of marriages are also prevalent, but their incidence of occurrence is insignificant in number.

Among the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur also a widowed or a divorced person can marry a divorced or a widowed person, and this type of marriage is known here as *Sāgāi*.

"If an Orāon bachelor wants to marry a widow, he has first to go through a mock marriage with a brass jar (*lotā*) or with a flower...." (Roy: 1928: 170). In the *Sāgāi* type of marriage, the ceremonies are much less elaborate than in the case of *Benjā* type (i.e. regular negotiation type of marriage).

I. FUNERAL CEREMONY

The mode of disposal of dead bodies among the Orāons of the Sunderban area is generally by burial. There is no common burial ground for the village in most cases, bodies generally being buried in the fields close to their house. A few well-to-do thoroughly Hinduised Orāons have adopted the Hindu custom of disposal of dead bodies by cremation. Bodies of persons dying of burns, are also disposed of by cremation.

In cases of deaths from some contagious diseases (e.g.

Cholera, Small-pox, Tuberculosis etc.) or deaths from unnatural causes (Snakebite, Drowning, Thunder and Lightning etc.) bodies are buried far away from the village boundary, after performing some magical rites for checking the influence of the evil spirits responsible for such deaths, and in a few cases (e.g. drowning), bodies are thrown away into the river or canal. Bodies are also thrown into the canal or river during outbreaks of epidemic diseases without properly performing the usual rites connected with the dead body disposal, on account of their extreme poverty.

Regarding the methods of disposal of the dead bodies among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, Roy says, "If a death has occurred before the setting in of the monsoon rains, the corpse is cremated at once. But if an Orāon dies after the sprouting of the new paddy seedlings of the year in June-July but before the harvest in November, the dead body is temporarily buried in the *māsān*...." (1928: 174)

Even in Ranchi, the tendency for disposal of dead bodies by cremation was increasing, but Orāons converted to Christianity invariably practise burial and non-Christians are also now taking to burial more freely. The probable reasons for the above are as follows:—

- (1) Depressed economic condition—cremation is much more expensive than the burial, and the poor people cannot afford to do it.
- (2) Deforestation—Due to clearing of forests, the wood required for cremation cannot be procured easily, and the price for the same in the local market is high.
- (3) Reservation of forest—Previously these people used to collect wood for cremation of the dead and other domestic purposes from the forest; but at present due to reservation of forests, this facility has greatly been reduced.

The above reasons also operate in Sunderban area too, leading to increased adoption of burial again for the disposal of the dead.

A detailed account of the funeral rites is given below

as practised by the Sunderban Orāons in cases of normal deaths.

I. BURIAL

(A) IN THE DECEASED'S HOUSE

(i) *General observances*: When a death occurs in an Orāon family of the Sunderban area, the females and the children of the family lament loudly, sitting by the side of the dead. If death occurs at night, no funeral rite is generally performed during the night but the members of the family wait till the dawn. During the whole night, one or more male members (usually the sons) of the family remain seated by the side of the corpse touching it because of the fear of spirit-intrusion. The members of the family do not take food or light the oven during this time. The relatives living nearby, are informed about the death by the members of the family or by the friends or neighbours. The neighbours and friends come to console them.

(ii) *Washing and dressing of the dead body*: Washing and dressing of the dead body are generally done within the room where the man died or on the courtyard (*Āngnā*) of the house. The female folk of the household generally perform the functions of washing and dressing. At first, after putting the dead body on the mat, the female members take off the amulets or ornaments (if any) from the body of the dead, and also the clothings, after which they rub the dead body with their left hand with a paste of turmeric and mustard oil, and sprinkle some cold water from an earthen pot (*Chukā*) on the dead body, and wash it also with their left hand. Then each of the women wipes the dead body with a piece of dry cloth. In case of death of a woman dying before her husband, vermilion marks are put on the forehead and the parting line of her hair.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, the dead body of an Orāon is taken out into the courtyard by the usual door, with its head pointing towards south and feet to the north. As soon as the dead body is taken out of the hut, ashes are strewn on

the floor and the doors are shut. These doors remain closed till the return of funeral party. After taking out the body into the courtyard, it is bathed with cold water and is anointed with oil and afterwards, the head is sometimes besmeared with oil and turmeric paste. In case of woman dying before her husband, her forehead and partings of her hair are anointed with vermilion mixed with oil. On hearing the wailing of the bereaved family, relatives and neighbours come quickly to the deceased's house, each carrying some paddy (*baipr*) in a small basket (*machua*) or on a winnowing fan (*sup*). They then pour the contents of their baskets into an empty basket kept by the side of the corpse. But this rite is not practised by the Orāons of Sunderban area.

Among the Hindu castes of the Sunderban area around the Orāons, the dead body is taken out of the room on the courtyard and after washing the body, is dressed with new clothes. The treatment of married woman dying before her husband, is also same as the Orāons.

(iii) *Uttering of Sābdi name*: If the dead person is a *Sādhuāli* or *Sādhu* (i.e. he who performed *Gurumukh* at the time of his father's death) then, as soon as the washing and dressing of the dead body is finished, a *Sādhu* (the man who sings *Sadhuali*) is called in for uttering the *Sābdi* name (the *mantra* which was uttered during the deceased's *Gurumukh*), and paid remuneration for his service.

This rite of uttering of *Sābdi* name is absent among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur area. Among the different castes and communities in Sunderban area, when a man is dying the name of *Lord Hari* is uttered and often *Kirtan* (psalm regarding *Lord Hari*) is sung.

(iv) *Preparation of funeral bier (Sarhā)*: In the meantime, the male members of the family with the help of villagers, start preparing the *Sarhā* (bier), for carrying the dead body. First of all, they take two bamboo poles (each generally about ten feet in length) and place a number of bamboo splits across the poles and tie them by means of cocount ropes. The two extreme ends of the bamboo poles are kept free so that the carriers of the corpse can hold these on their shoulders.

The Ranchi Orāons prepare the *Sarhā* or *Sangat* (bier) almost in the identical way, so also the Hindu castes of Deltaic Bengal.

(v) *Wearing of Funeral Clothes (Lugā Parānā)*: After the dead body is washed and dressed, it is placed by a few male members on the *Sarhā* (bier) kept on the courtyard (*Āngnā*). Before placing the dead body over the *Sarhā*, a mat (*Pātiā*) made of date palm leaves, covered with a new white long cloth (*Lugā*) is spread over the *Sarhā* by the elderly women.

The body is placed on the bier in such a way that the head of the dead body points towards the south. When the body is brought out on the courtyard, the door of the room where the man breathed his last, remains open. Some of the relatives, generally women, put a second piece of *Lugā* on the dead body and the old clothings of the dead are kept by the side of the dead on the *Sarhā* after which the dead body is again covered with the third piece of *Lugā*, all the *Lugās* being of same size and of same material. The body is generally not tied by means of any rope with the *Sarhā*.

The above procedures are also observed more or less in a similar way by the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities living around the Orāons of Sunderban area and also by the Ranchi Orāons.

(vi) *Articles required for the disposal of dead body*: The following articles are usually required for the disposal of the dead body. Some uncooked *usnā* rice, some paddy, mustard seeds, flowers, a copper coin, an earthen pot containing *hāndiā* (liquor), three twigs of *Bāblā* tree (*Acacia*) etc. All these are kept on a *Sup* (winnowing fan) by the side of the dead body on the *Sarhā*, and along with these broom sticks, digging implements such as hoe (*Köder*), scythe (*Dāoli*) etc are also kept. Further, a brass pot for carrying water, sanctified with *Tulsi* leaves (*Basil*), *Bolān* (the straw-rope) and *Nārā* (straw taken from the roof of the house of the deceased) are also required for the disposal.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur also require different articles for disposal, of which paddy, boiled rice, some oil and

copper coins are most important. "If the deceased belonged to a well-to-do family, small straw bundle (*tipsi*) containing paddy is carried by some man behind the corpse" (Roy: 1928: 173).

The Hindus of the Sunderban area also take with them *Khai* (fried paddy), copper coins etc. during the disposal of their dead, which are scattered on the road as the procession is proceeding to the cremation ground.

(B) THE FUNERAL PROCESSION AND THE RITES OBSERVED

When all the rites (which must be observed in the deceased's house before starting), are over, some of the relatives (generally sons) friends and villagers (number of whom are four) lift the bier (*Sarhā*) up on their shoulders uttering "*Bala Hari; Haribol*" (i.e. uttering the name of Lord *Hari*) three times, and start for the adjoining field for the disposal of the body. The funeral procession generally consists of relatives, both male and female (excepting the newly wed girls and pregnant women), friends of the dead, members of the Panchayet and villagers etc. An old woman follows the procession, carrying with her the *Sup* (winnowing fan that was kept on the *Sarhā* previously) containing different articles for the funeral purposes. She also takes along with the *Sup*, the earthen vessel containing *hāndiā* and the broom sticks. One of the male relatives carries the *Bolān* and the *Nārā*, and the others take the brass pot for sanctified waters of *Tulsi* (Basil), digging implements etc. During the course of the journey, the members of the funeral procession utter *Bala-Hari, Hari-Bol*" several times, and an old woman sprinkles some water, *usnā* rice (i.e. per-boiled rice) and paddy at three different places on the way on the feet of the four persons, who carry the bier on their shoulders.

As regards the funeral procession of the Orāons of Ranchi district, Roy writes: "Whether the corpse be that of a male or a female it is only women who must carry it on the bier on their shoulders with the hands, to the *masān* or cremation ground of the village. But a pregnant woman may not take part in carrying the corpse or in any other

rite connected with the dead' (1928: 173). But this practice is totally absent among the Orāons of Sunderban, and also have fallen into disuse in many of the present-day Orāon villages of Ranchi District.

In a funeral procession of Ranchi Orāons, both males and females participate.

Among the Hindu castes and communities of the Sunderban area, the dead body is taken to the cremation ground on a bier by four or more male persons followed by other male-relatives and friends carrying different articles. The women generally do not participate in the procession, unlike the Orāons of both the areas.

'*Bala-Hari*', '*Hari-Bol*' (i.e. uttering the name of *Lord Hari*) is also uttered at the time of leaving the house for the cremation ground and also during the course of the journey by the Hindus of the area. This is also done by the Sunderban Orāons, but this is not prevalent amongst the Ranchi Orāons.

Among the Ranchi Orāons, one woman scatters paddy and cotton now and then, on the way, and among the Hindus of the Sunderban area, *Khai* (fried paddy) is generally scattered.

(C) OBSERVANCES AT THE DECEASED'S HOUSE AFTER THE FUNERAL PROCESSION HAS LEFT

When the funeral procession leaves the house, the women folk of the household clean the floor, lower part of the walls (both inner and outer sides) of the hut and the courtyard, and apply solution of cow-dung, earth and water to purify the house. After cleaning, they spread some ashes (*Rākh*) on the floor of the room where the man died, after which they come out of the room and close the door.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, the spreading of ashes and closing of the door of the room where the man died, are done as soon as the dead body is brought out of the room. When the funeral procession leaves the house for *māsān*, the female folk of the house clean and wash it by besmearing with a solution of cow-dung, earth and water.

Among the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities of Sunderban area, the custom of keeping of ashes on the

floor of the room of the dead is absent, but often the house is washed and cleaned as in the case of the Orāons.

(D) OBSERVANCES AT THE PLACE OF DISPOSAL

(i) *Buying of earth*: Reaching the adjoining field, they keep the *Sarhā* on the ground in such a way that the head of the dead points towards the south. The eldest son of the dead places the copper coin, on the spot selected for burial as an indication of the land being symbolically purchased for burial purpose from the *Dharma* or *Bhagwān* (the Almighty God who is supposed to be the owner of all the lands of the universe) so that the soul of the dead may get temporary shelter there. In absence of the eldest son, the above rite is done by the next son or brother or brother's son or others.

Roy and other authors do not mention anything about the rite of purchase of earth from the Supreme Deity while discussing about the funeral ceremony of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur whereas this is prevalent amongst some backward Hindu communities of the Sunderban from whom the immigrant Orāons appear to have borrowed the custom.

(ii) *Digging of the grave*: After the symbolic purchase of the earth, a few persons (generally those who carried the bier excluding the son) dig the grave in the north-south direction, which is about ten feet in length and about three feet in breadth. In case of the adult males, the depth of the grave is almost equal to the height of their waist, whereas in case of adult females the depth is equal to the height of their chest. The first three clods of earth (*Pahelā-māti*) are kept separately on the side of the head of the dead as also the copper coin by the side of the grave.

When the grave is dug out, the sons of the dead (in their absence other male kins) lift the body from the *Sarhā*, and two other persons (who dug up the grave) place the mat and the *Lugā* from the bier on the floor of the pit.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, during the digging of the grave, the first three clods of earth are kept separately by them. This custom is absent here. The pit is dug generally in the north-south direction. "Three long branches of

the *karanj* (*Pongamia glabra*) tree are each doubled up in the form of the letter U and let down into the pit so that the two ends of each branch stick out along and above the eastern and western walls of the pit, and the central portion of each branch lies flat on the floor of the pit. Then three *Sāl* wood poles are placed cross-ways over them at the bottom of the pit with their length from north to south" (Roy: 1928: 174).

(iii) *Token Feeding and Laying the Dead body in the pit*: After this, some female relatives of the dead, one after another, put some boiled rice (*bhāt*) and a little *hāndiā* into the mouth of the dead and wash it with water. As soon as this rite is over the persons who carry bier, move round the grave along with the dead body three times from south to north in the anti-clockwise direction, and hand over the corpse to those two persons who have, in the mean time, descended within the pit. They lay the body on its back over the *Lugā*, spread over the mat on the floor of the pit, with its head towards the south.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur also put some *usnā* rice and drop rice-beer into the mouth of the dead, with the utterance of a prayer and wash the mouth every time. Then, after moving round the pit (keeping the pit to their left) with the dead body three times, it is laid into the pit. Sometimes the dead body is consigned into the grave with the help of a rope.

Among some of the backward castes and communities of Sunderban, this custom of token feeding of the dead body is practised.

(iv) *Touching Fire to Mouth (Mukhe Āgun)*: The eldest son of the dead then observes the rite of *Mukhe-Āgun*. He lights the *Nārā* by the left hand with the fire of the *Bolān*, and touches the mouth of the dead with the burning end of *Nārā* thrice. After this he puts the *Nārā* and the *Bolān* by the side of the dead inside the pit. At present the Hinduised Orāons of the Sunderban area perform the *Mukhe-Āgun* ceremony with the help of a branch of wood-apple (*Egle mar-*

melos Corica) or Fig (*Ficus cunis*), one end of which is wrapped with a piece of cloth which is set fire to.

As regards the above ceremony of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, none of the authors has mentioned anything about the rite of touching the mouth of the dead with fire before burial.

All the Hindu inhabitants of the Southern Bengal and also of other areas perform this *Mukhe Āgun* rite as the first step in the cremation of the dead body, and this rite of *Mukhe-Āgun* to the dead body before burial has obviously been borrowed from the local Hindus by these immigrant Orāons of Sunderban tract.

(v) *Last rites during burial : Covering the dead body*—After the *Mukhe-Āgun* rite is over, one of the relatives of the dead, put the *Sarhā* (bier) over the dead body on which a mat (*pātiā*) is placed keeping the face uncovered.

Offerings of earth and pice—The eldest son, then, takes a handful of earth from the first few clods of earth kept separately, and puts these along with a few copper coins down to the grave. Earth is then put into the grave by the relatives and other people participating in the burial. The belief behind these offerings is that the departed soul will construct a hut with the earth and purchase food with the coins.

After the offerings of the earth and coin, the sup containing different articles is offered and placed by the side of the dead.

Among the Ranchi Orāons also the offerings are made in the same way but the earth offered is not from the first clods of earth as is done by the Sunderban Orāons.

The conception behind such types of offerings is also quite similar to that of the Sunderban Orāons.

Insertion and Pulling out of Dom-Kāthi (Stick for respiration)—After the offerings of earth and coins, the eldest son inserts a clean axis of the branch of date-palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) known as *Dom-Kāthi* vertically through the gap of the mouth of the dead so that the soul may carry on respiration. Then the grave is filled up with earth, and one of the relatives pulls out the *Dom-Kāthi* from the grave leaving a small hole which is meant for passing out of the soul. Then the eldest son pours some cold water from a pitcher (*Khop-*

bhār) on this hole and closes it with the earth. The earthen pitcher (*Khopbhār*) containing water, is kept there.

The custom of inserting and pulling out of the *Dom-Kāthi* from the grave is absent among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area. There an earthenware jar (*gāgri*) filled with water, is placed over a straw pad (*neto*) on the grave at the spot directly over the head of the dead. Three tooth-cleaning *Sāl* twigs known as *masnā-karurkā* i.e. tooth brushes of the cremation ground, are placed by the side of the jar. Then three perforations are made on the body of the jar so as to let the water of the jar flow out. In some areas of Chotā-Nāgpur, the Orāons place a *dubhā* or cup of bell metal on the southern end of the grave when it is nearly filled up. When the grave is completely filled up with earth, paddy grains are broadcast over it.

(E) PURIFICATORY BATH

When the burial is completed, the participants take bath in the nearby water-sources, and the women and children of the deceased's household who remained in the house take their bath in the pond after which all assemble in the house of the deceased. Then sanctified *Tulsi-jal* is brought by the *Gunin*. The digging implements used for burial are also brought there.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur after burial sprinkle pounded turmeric diluted in water all round by way of purification, and those who attend the funeral, take bath in stream or tank. The Hindu people of the Sunderban area also take bath after cremation.

(F) OBSERVANCES AT THE DECEASED'S HOUSE AFTER DISPOSAL

(i) *Ceremonial Purification* : On reaching the deceased's house, the *Gunin* sprinkles sanctified water of Basil (*Tulsi-jal*) over the heads of members assembled there and also on the hut, house-hold utensils and implements, courtyard etc. for purifying these. One of the villagers lights up fire on husks in different spots on the courtyard, and each spot of fire is meant for the people belonging to each of the *gotros*. Then the members of each *gotro* pour a little mustard oil over the respective fire, and touch the smoke coming out of it by their

palms and rub the same on their bodies. Members belonging to a particular *gotro* (sib), are prohibited from touching the fire of other *gotro* (sib). In this way, every one, irrespective of sex and age, becomes purified. The eldest son of the deceased observes this purificatory rite first, and is followed by other relatives, friends and villagers. Before putting off the fire, the last person of the *gotro* of the deceased purifies with touch of fire, all the implements (such as hoe, scythe etc) used for the burial. The Ranchi Orāons also in the same way purify themselves by touching the smoke emitted from rice-husk fire. But nothing has been mentioned by Roy or any other author about allotting a separate fire to each *gotro*. After purification by touching fire, every one rubs a little turmeric paste and oil on some part of his or her body. But the using of turmeric and oil paste as a means for purification among the Ranchi Orāons is not observed by the Sundebrbn Orāons.

Many of the Hindu castes of Sunderban as well as other areas of Bengal, perform the purificatory rite by touching fire, iron implements and chewing Nim leaves (*Melia azadirachta*).

(ii) *Drinking of Kādhmāti Hāndiā* (rice-beer for the funeral attendants) : After purification, all the assembled persons, especially those who took active part in the disposal of the dead, are supplied with a special type of *hāndiā* or rice-beer known as *Kādhmāti hāndiā*. After finishing this, all go back to their respective houses excepting a few near relatives.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur also sometimes observe the above custom.

(iii) *Determination of spirit-intrusion* : Before leaving the deceased's house, the *Gunin* and a few other elderly persons enter the room where the person died, and watch the ashes on the floor (which were spread earlier) for tracing out any marks on it, and the *Gunin* by observing these marks, can trace out the spirit responsible for the death of the man.

Among the Orāons of Ranchi district, tracing out of the spirit responsible for the death is generally done during *Ekh-mankha* or 'Taking back the Shade' rite, which is observed at a later phase by them.

(g) OBSERVANCES DURING MOURNING PERIOD

(i) *Mourning period* : The period of mourning among the

Orāons of Sunderban generally varies from one day to one month. Only in cases of unnatural deaths and deaths due to Cholera, Small-pox and other epidemics etc. one-day mourning is observed ; but in cases of normal deaths, the mourning period extends beyond one day. Always odd number of days (3,5,7,9 etc.) are taken as the length of the mourning period, and during this period, the members of the family and near kins of the deceased observe different rites, rituals and taboos.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, previously, were not accustomed to observe a mourning period, but at present they are seen to be observing the same for ten or more days in a good number of villages during which they observe different rites and prohibitions etc. The lower class Hindus of Sunderban area generally observe the mourning period for one month, though sometimes, due to varied reasons, this period is shortended. It seems that the conception of mourning period has been borrowed by the Orāons from the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities.

(ii) *Prohibitions and Taboos observed during Mourning period* : During the mourning period, all the members of the family and relatives are prohibited from taking fish, meat, egg etc. Boiled rice and *dāl* (boiled pulses excepting *Musur*) is generally taken during this period. The Hinduised Orāons generally take boiled *āruā* rice and not *usnā* rice. Fruits are also taken. They are also prohibited from attending any socio-religious ceremonies, and no socio-religious ceremony etc. can be performed in the house of the mourner during this period. The mourners should not cut hair, shave beard, and moustache, pare nail etc. and rub oil on head and body, and also cannot use luxury goods (e.g. cosmetics etc.), new clothes, shoes etc. during the mourning period. Ranchi Orāons also observe almost similar taboos, so also the neighbouring Hindu castes and communities around the Orāons. The latter usually take *Habisya* of *āruā* rice with a few varieties of pulses and vegetables. Fruit is also taken.

(iii) *Offerings of Food and Drinks to the departed Soul during Mourning period* : During the first three evenings of the mourning period, the female folk of the household prepare

two sets of banana leaf cups, each set consisting of three cups. In each set, one cup contains cooked rice, the other *dāl* and the third a little water mixed with *hāndiā*. One set is taken by a female member of the house and placed on the southern side i.e. head end of the grave, and the other set is kept in one corner of the room where the man died. Every morning, the family members watch to find out any scratch or such other marks on the food, which indicate that the soul has taken the food. This rite is not observed in cases of those children who did not take cooked rice during their lifetime i.e. in cases of very little children.

This rite of offerings of the food etc. to the departed soul during the mourning period is absent among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur.

(iv) *Ceremonial Lustration after Mourning period (Kheori Kāmān or Nāpti)*: On the last day of the pollution period, a barber is called in for shaving the head, beard and moustache, and also for paring the nails of the sons of the dead. The daughter and the wife of the dead and also other near relatives (both male and female) pare their mails only. The barber gets remuneration for his service. After shaving etc, all of them rub their body with paste of turmeric and mustard oil, and take bath. On this day, they take only boiled rice and vegetables but refrain from taking fish, meat etc.

Regarding lustration etc. among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, Roy says nothing about shaving of head, beards, paring of nails etc. but now-a-days this is practised by a good number of Orāons of different villages of Chotā-Nāgpur. These methods of final purification are widely prevalent not simply among the Hindu castes and communities of the Sunderban area but also of other areas, and this rite has probably been borrowed by the Orāons from the Hindu castes like Pod, Bagdi, Mahishya etc.

(H) WORSHIP OF THE ANCESTORS

In the next morning, the head of the family worships the ancestors (*Burāburi*) and the ancestral village. One portion of the courtyard is cleaned with cow-dung, earth and water,

and three heaps of *āruā* rice are kept on three spots. After feeding a fowl with the *āruā* rice from each of these heaps, and after uttering the names of the ancestors and the ancestral village the fowl is sacrificed. After the sacrifice, the head of the fowl is burnt, and a little of it is offered to the dead soul, and also to his birth place. Then with the meat of this sacrificed fowl, *Tahari* is prepared, and is taken by all the members of the family, belonging to the same *gotro* as that of the dead.

In connection with the death ceremonies of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, no writer has mentioned anything about the ancestor worship. Further, it may be mentioned here that in some of the Orāon villages of Chotā-Nāgpur *Gamī* or the attendant ceremony is performed after death. In this ceremony, the relatives and friends of the deceased go to the burial ground taking with them different articles such as vermilion, betel nuts, *cowrie*, a piece of cotton known as *Kāflugā*, molasses, turmeric, three long branches of mango tree etc. Reaching the burial ground, one of them digs out the *dubhā* or cup of bell-metal (left inside the grave during burial) which is afterwards sold or given away to others. Then one of the relatives makes a figure of earth (male or female as the case may be) and dresses it with the piece of *Kāflugā*. A pyre is made thereafter and by its sides branches of mango tree are posted. One of the nearest relatives sprinkles water with a mango leaf on the pyre with the utterance of prayer, for keeping the members of the deceased's family happy. This ceremony is known as *Utdhār* meant for easy transit of the soul to the next world. Then the earthen figure is revolved round the pyre anticlockwise three times, and is then laid down on the pyre with its head pointing towards the south. The figure is then symbolically fed with edible things, after which the relatives and friends move round the pyre anticlockwise three times and to this fire is set. When the pyre begins to blaze, they go back home after washing mouth and feet.

These rites are not observed by the Orāons of Sunderban and also have fallen into disuse in some Orāon villages of Ranchi.

(I) UTTAR KHILĀ

The *Uttar Khilā* ceremony is performed at any time of the day before the setting of the sun and a *Gunin* or *Pāhān* conducts this ceremony. The following nine articles are required: *Āruā* rice, powdered *āruā* rice, paddy, fried rice (*Khai*), mustard seeds, a kind of pulse (*Māskalāi*), a paste of turmeric and mustard oil, iron filings and meat of black fowl. Each item of these articles is kept separately on nine banana bark plates (*Kalār dongā*). Sometimes a chicken (*Kātul*) is also required for the purpose. When all the arrangements are completed, the *Gunin* or the *Pāhān* takes a little of *āruā* rice and feeds the chicken with it, and after uttering the name of the dead, he sacrifices the chicken.

The *Gunin* then digs up a small pit in a corner of the courtyard, keeping these nine plates of articles and an earthen pot (*chukā*) of water round the mouth of the pit. He gives the sons and other relatives of the deceased a little from each of these plates, who throw these into the pit along with coins, uttering the name of the deceased. At last the *Gunin* takes out all the coins from the pit, and fills it up with the earth, and pours water of the vessel over it.

The Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons also perform the *Uttar Khilā* ceremony in an identical way. But articles required for this ceremony among the Ranchi Orāons are somewhat different from those of the Sunderban Orāons. In the Ranchi area, the articles required are cotton-seeds (*bangur*) or fried pulse (*Phaseolous roxburghii*), fried *lotni* (a species of mustard), *lohsinga* (slag of iron), and *laoa* (a kind of fried rice) etc, and all these are kept in a cup made of three leaves of the *Jitiā pipar* (*Ficus religiosa*) tree, with stem of the leaves joined together. A chicken or a pig is generally sacrificed.

This '*Uttar Khilā*' ceremony is traditionally an Orāon rite, and no prototype of this is prevalent among the local Hindus who however perform a *Yajna* ceremony during *Srādh* ceremony.

(J) BHELOA-PHARI

After finishing the *Uttar Khilā*, the *Gunin* or the

Pāhān performs the *Bheloā-phāri* ceremony (which has been discussed in the chapter dealing with Magico-Religious-Beliefs and Practices). Those who observe *Sādhuāli*, perform the *Bheloā-phāri* ceremony next morning.

In Ranchi district also, the Orāons perform *Dāndā-kāṭṭā* or *Bheloā-phāri* ceremony after *Uttar khilā* ceremony.

This is also absent among the neighbouring Hindus of Southern Bengal.

(K) TAKING BACK THE SHADE

(*Chhāher Chukhānā* or *Chhāher Uttar*)

In the evening, the *Gunin* keeps some *āruā* rice on the cover of an earthen pot, and on the rice he puts a lighted lamp, and keeps this in the room where the man died. On the floor of the room, ashes are spread. He utters the name of the dead thrice, and asks the departed soul to come back to the house. He also asks the son of the dead and others to burn the *hut* of the dead (i.e. to burn the symbolic hut of the dead). The above persons silently go to the field where the man was buried, with a hoe (*Koder*), a sickle (*Hānsuā*), some jute sticks and straw, but the *Gunin* remains inside the room where the man died, with door closed.

On reaching the field, they build with jute sticks and straw, a miniature type of hut which represents symbolically the hut of the dead. The son of the deceased then sets fire to this symbolic house with a match-stick and starts calling his father loudly, "*Bābā, Āye, Tor Ghar Puri Jāli Lagei*".

(Come Father, your house is burning). This he utters three times. When the hut is totally burnt, all of them come back, beating the sickle against the hoe. On reaching the house, they approach the room and request the *Gunin* to open the door of the room. The *Gunin* asks, "*Kon, Āpān Nā Birān*" (Who is there, own men or outsider?). They answer, "*Āpān*" (Own men). The *Gunin* again asks, "*Dukh Leke Āli, Nā Sukh Leke Āli?*" (What have you brought, happiness or sorrow?) They answer, "*Dukh Phelke Āli, Sukh Leke Āli*". (We have brought happiness leaving the sorrow behind).

These questions are asked three times by the *Gunin*, whereto they answer also thrice. After this, the *Gunin* opens the door, and they enter it. With their entrance, if the flame of the lamp inside the room flickers or goes down, it is proved that the soul of the deceased has entered the room. Then guided by the *Gunin*, they go near the ashes that were spread on the floor to see whether there is any scratch mark on the ashes or not, which will give an idea as to the spirit responsible for the death. This rite is also observed by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur in an identical way. In Ranchi, this rite of calling back the soul is known as *Ekh-mānkhā*. In connection with this ceremony, Roy writes, "If the flame is seen wavering, it is believed that the shade has come back to the house. If the flame does not waver but remains steady, the women again go out and repeat the *ekh-mankhnā* ceremony. When the flame wavers and it is inferred that the shade has come back, the ashes on the floor are examined to see if there are any traces of foot of any animals or reptiles. If such traces are found, it is believed that some spirit or witch has caused the death. But if no such trace is found, it is believed that it was a case of natural death" (1928: 179).

(L) BAITHAKI OR SĀDHUĀLI

Next evening the *Baiṭhaki* or *Sādhuaḷi* is held and is performed only by those who have accepted the discipleship of the *Sāduaḷis* or *Sādhus*. An earthen platform or altar is erected within the room or on the courtyard. The articles required for the *Baiṭhaki* are sweets (*Bātāsā*), incense, a piece of white cloth about two and half yards long and another small piece of white cloth. On four corners of the earthen platform, four wooden posts are pitched, and on these four posts a small piece of white cloth is spread. The book (*Pārwaṇ* book) containing *Sādhuaḷi* songs is kept on the platform and the *Sādhua* and his disciples sing the *Sādhuaḷi* songs which are the psalms about *Dharma*, *Siva*, *Nārāyan* etc. throughout the whole night with the sound of their belmetal plates (*Khanjani*) and drum (*Dhol*). Early in the next morning just before dawn, the son or in his absence the grandson

of the deceased is brought to that place and is given a wooden seat to sit on after which he is surrounded with a piece of cloth. To perform the *Gurumukh* rite, the *Sādhu* murmurs incantations so that no one except that boy hears it. This incantation is known as *Sādhuāli mantra*. Then he blows three times into both the ears of the boy and gives him a *bātāsā* (sweet) to eat. Afterwards the covering is taken away and he is allowed to go.

Each member of the *Sādhuāli* party is generally given a fee of Rs. 1.25np, a little hemp and rice-beer etc.

This ceremony reminds one, of the *Kirtan* (holy songs) at the time of *Srādh* ceremony of the Bengalee Hindus. The *Sādhuāli* is performed for the welfare of the family members and also for the peace of the dead in the other world. Sometimes the members of a few backward Hindu castes of the Sunderban area who know this rite, also participate in this.

The *Sādhuāli* or *Baithaki* is totally absent among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area. But this rite as practised by the Orāons of Sunderban, is quite similar to the *Nām-Kirtan* (holy songs in the name of Lord Vishnu) of the Hindus sung at the time of *Srādh* ceremony. The *Gurumukh* of the Orāons also is quite similar to the *Mantra dān* of the Hindus i.e. giving of particular *mantra* (incantation) to the disciple by a *Guru* (Master).

Thus, it appears that the immigrant Orāons of Sunderban have imbibed from the local Hindus to a considerable extent the practice of singing holy songs towards the close of funeral rites.

II. CREMATION

Cremation is practised to a very limited extent by those few rich Orāons of Sunderban who have been thoroughly Hinduised. There is no fixed place for cremation like burial, and the rites performed in the house of the deceased and along the way from the house of the dead to the cremation ground are quite similar to those followed in case of burial.

In the place of disposal after buying the earth, they prepare the funeral pyre (*Chitā*) in the way described below:—

At first a small pit is dug, and in it three layers of fire wood are arranged, one upon the other in a criss-crossmanner in the north-south direction. Over the third row, the mat, and on the mat the cloth (*Lugā*) are spread. After placing the body on the pyre, another three rows of fire-wood are arranged over the body as was done previously, keeping the mouth uncovered for *Mukhe-Āgun* rite. Before placing the body on the pyre, token feeding and other rites are observed as in the case of burial. After arranging the pyre, the eldest son performs the *Mukhe-Āgun* rite and pours a little *ghṛee* (clarified butter) on the pyre, and sets fire with the blazing *Nārā* and jute sticks or with the blazing branch of wood apple etc. When the cremation is over, the sons and relatives pour water on the ashes, and the eldest son collects the *Nāvi* (navel) of the dead, washes it thoroughly and keeps it within a new earthen pot (*chukā*). The pollution, purification, and all the other obsequial rites are observed in the same manner as in the case of burial, excepting that every evening of first five days of the mourning period, the women folk of the household light an earthen lamp in front of the *chukā* containing the navel, kept in one corner of the cow-shed. In the morning of the fifth day, the eldest son of the deceased performs *Burāburi puṣṭā* or ancestral worship in the cow-shed before the *chukā* which contains the navel. After this, taking the *chukā* containing the navel, on his left palm, he goes to a nearby water source (generally a river), where the Hindu Brahmin or the community priest worships the ancestors of the man, and throws the pot containing the navel into water. Then they take bath. It may be mentioned here that this rite is quite similar to the navel-drowning ceremony of the neighbouring Hindu castes performed after cremation. Most probably this rite has been borrowed by the Orāons of this area from their Hindu neighbours.

Among the Orāons of the Chotā-Nāgpur area, “when a death takes place after harvest and before the sprouting of the new paddy plants, the dead body is carried to the *maṣāṇ* or cremation-ground” (Roy : 1928 : 175). The pre-cremational

rites of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur are also quite identical to their pre-burial rites. In the *maśāṇ* a pit of wood is arranged over six small wooden posts planted in two parallel rows of three each running north to south, one row now being placed to the east of the other. Then the body is placed on the pyre in such a way that its head points towards south. Then a pile of wood is placed over the corpse, and some near relatives wave some fire on some straw round the mouth of the corpse, and thereafter set fire to the pyre by the fire of this straw. Other successive rites are quite similar to those of the burial rites practised by them.

Two peculiar customs of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur connected with the death ceremony are mentioned below. These are not practised by Orāons of Sunderban. One of these rites is *Hochol-punp Pesā*, meaning gathering the bones. After cremation "women go to the cremation ground (*maśāṇ*) and pick up the remnants of the bones of the neck, arms, legs and chest of the deceased with their left hands" (Roy: 1928: 178). But at present both men and women go to the cremation ground for collecting the bones of the dead.

After washing the bones and wiping them out with a new piece of cloth and anointing them with turmeric paste, these are kept in an earthen pot along with some coins and an image of the dead made of grass. While keeping the bones in the jar, each of the members kisses these. Previously, in case of burial the grave used to be dug up for gathering the bones. But at present the bones (Cowrie, betel-unt etc.) of the earthen figure (representing the dead) represent symbolically the bones of the dead. Sometimes a little earth from the grave also serves the purpose.

The next rite is *Kohā-Benjā* (Great wedding) or *Hār-borā* (Bone-drowning). In this ceremony the bones or their equivalents thus gathered, are taken to the *Kundi* or bone-drowning place by the side of a river with dance and music. "Arrived at the *Kūṇḍi*, the men snatch away the urns from the women who have carried them, consign the bones into the water and smash the earthen ware vessels to pieces by striking them against the *Pūlkhi* stone of the clan" (Roy: 1928: 181). At

present both males and females take bones to the *Kūṇḍi*. In many of the villages no separate *Pūlkhi* stones for particular sibs are seen.

After purification bath and other rites, they return to their own village. After a day or two the *Pāhūn* pacifies the whole village (*Paddā-Kāmnā*).

Previously the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur used to ceremonially erect *Pūlkhi* or memorial stones on the grave or cremation place. But at present this rite has almost been abandoned. It is also absent among the Orāons of Sunderban.

III. DISPOSAL OF BODIES OF UNNATURAL DEATHS.

The funeral ceremonies described above are in general followed by the Orāons of the Sunderban area, but some deviations from the above can be noticed in the case of a person who has taken *Sādhuaḷi mantras*, persons dying of unnatural death, in case of pregnant woman dying during delivery etc. The rites observed in connection with such deaths are mentioned below.

(a) In the case of a person who has taken *Sādhuaḷi mantras*, the rites observed are quite similar to those described earlier, excepting that he is buried in a sitting posture like a *Sādhū* and not in a lying position as is done in an ordinary case.

(b) In case of the death of a very young child, the body is generally buried in the adjoining field, and the mourning period extends only upto three days. Elaborate rituals that are associated with normal deaths are generally not observed.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur the corpses of children dying before the ear-boring ceremony, are buried at the village *māsān*, and *Hārborā* ceremony is generally not observed.

Among some of the Hindu castes and communities around the Orāons of the Sunderban area, bodies of little children are disposed of by burial and not by cremation. Obsequial and post-obsequial rites are also not observed in detail.

(c) In cases of persons dying of unnatural deaths (e.g. thunder and lightening, snake bite, Cholera, Small pox Tuberculosis etc.) no elaborate rites are performed. Before and

after the disposal of the dead body, the *Gunin* performs some magical rites with mustard seeds etc. to sanctify the persons taking part in the funeral, so that they are protected from the evil spirits. The body is taken far away from the village boundary and buried there. Precautions are taken by throwing charmed mustard seeds on the spot where the grave will be dug, so that the soul of the dead man cannot enter the village and cause harm to others. The dead is undressed and the naked body is simply laid down into the pit with face downwards. No rite is performed in this connection. The *Gunin* then puts four iron nails on four corners of the pit, and the grave is covered with earth. The dress, ornaments etc. of the dead are buried in another pit on the western side of the grave. After this, the *Gunin* again throws the magically charmed articles on all the persons taking part in the funeral. After bath, they return home and the *Gunin* purifies the house with magically charmed articles.

No other obsequial rites, no mourning period, no post-mourning rites etc. are observed. Generally the women, children, sick and weak persons do not participate in the funeral procession.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur also more or less follow the same types of procedures in connection with deaths due to unnatural causes.

(d) In case of a pregnant woman dying before or during child-birth, no elaborate ceremony is observed. The dead body is simply taken far away from the village boundary. Before starting with the dead body, the *Gunin* gives sanctified mustard seeds as prophylactic charms to those who carry the bier, and utters magical *mantras* to drive away the evil spirits. He also throws some mustard seeds on the spot where the woman will be buried. After putting the dead body inside the pit, the husband of the woman rends the belly of the woman with a sharp knife, and the *Gunin* pitches four nails on four corners of the grave after which the grave is covered. The *Gunin* again throws some charmed mustard seeds on these people, murmuring magical spell in order to expel the evil spirit. Then, after bath, they return home, where the *Gunin* performs

final purification ceremony by performing magical rites, so that the evil spirit of the dead woman does not harm any pregnant woman and any other person of the village. No rites and rituals are observed.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, "the bodies of the pregnant women or of women dying in child-bed are not burnt but are buried outside the village and on the boundary-line between the village and an adjoining village. Before such a corpse is buried, both the eyes are sewn up with thorns, and the hands and legs are broken and the corpse is laid in the grave with its face downwards deep in the ground, and thorns are pinned into the palms of the hands and soles of the feet". (Roy : 1928 : 186). A *Māti* or spirit doctor accompanies such a dead person, scattering mustard-seeds all along the way muttering magic spells. "It is believed that the spirit of the woman, which becomes a *Chūril*, cannot reach back to her village until it has picked up all the mustard-seeds thus scattered which is an impossible task..... A *Chūril*, it is believed, runs after and seeks to possess every man that it meets, for, it is said, its carnal appetite remained unsatisfied in life, and it still longs for a mate of the other sex" (Roy : 1928 : 186-187).

(c) In case of death due to drowning, the Sunderban Orāons throw the dead body into the river or canal water without performing most of the rites connected with normal death as death due to drowning is regarded as an unnatural death. The *Gunin* or *Mati* sanctifies the persons before and after the burial with charmed mustard seeds.

(f) In case of still birth, the body is simply buried in the field adjoining the house. Final purification is done in the same day, and no other rites are observed.

The above types of deaths are also similarly treated by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, and also by a few backward Hindu castes and communities of the area.

CHAPTER VII

VILLAGE ORGANISATION

The Orāons of Sunderban formerly had both full-fledged *Grām-Panchāyet* (village council) and *Pārḥā Panchāyet* (inter-village Council). But now a days the *Pārḥā-Panchāyet*, is almost nonexistent, and the village *Panchāyet* nominally exists in the form of an elders' council. The *Grām Panchāyet* deals with minor socio-religious disputes etc. within the particular village and the *Pārḥā-Panchāyet*, whose jurisdiction extended over a number of villages, used to deal with the disputes in between two or more villages. As to the concept behind the formation of these organisations, Roy says, "The pressure of common danger and a consciousness of the common good appeared to have suggested most of the institutions.....The prime care of the people,—the dominant idea directing and controlling the tribal soul, has been how to live and multiply, how to maintain an independent tribal existence and solidarity, how to secure good luck and avoid ill luck in so far as tribal security, health, cattle and agricultural interests are concerned" (1915 : 432).

VILLAGE COUNCIL (GRĀM PANCHĀYET)

The *Grām-Panchāyet* of an Orāon village of Sunderban now-a-days deals only with the minor socio-religious and socio-

political affairs, and the *Panchāyet* generally consists of the aged and influential section of the community, though theoretically the *Panchāyet* includes the entire village community irrespective of age and socio-economic status of the people. Previously the *Panchāyet* used to play a dominant part in settling disputes in all matters of public as well as private life of the Orāons, but at present the *Panchāyet* has practically lost its hold over the people, and many of them even dare to go against the decision of this vestigial rudiment of the village political unit, and approach law courts or police, generally when the judgement of the village council goes against them.

The following four categories of personnel generally comprise an Orāon village *Panchāyet* in the Sunderban area :—

- (1) *Rājmorāl*—Headman (One).
- (2) *Mantri*—Assistant and Advisor to *Rājmorāl*—(One).
- (3) Members—Elderly persons (number not fixed).
- (4) *Choukider*—Messenger—(One).

The Office of the *Rājmorāl* i.e. the headman of the *Panchāyet* is usually hereditary i.e. after the death or retirement of a *Rājmorāl* his eldest son succeeds to the office of his father. But at present, in many villages, hereditary leadership is overthrown by the personal efficiency and influence (as previously discussed in detail in Chapter V). The *Rājmorāl* selects the *Mantri* as the Assistant Headman considering his activity, experience, socio-economic status and influence etc. over the people. The members are selected from the elderly section of the community considering the above-mentioned characteristics that are followed in the case of selection of the *Mantri*. The *Rājmorāl* after consulting the *Mantri* and other elderly and influential persons of the community, selects these members. The *Choukider* or the messenger, who acts as a message-carrier, is selected by the *Panchāyet*. The officials and the members of a village *Panchāyet* have to go through a swearing in ceremony after their selection. The oath is administered in the name of the Supreme Deity (*Dharma* or *Bhagwān*) before the gathering of all influential persons of the village. Besides the

above village officials, other adult male members of the village (who are not regular members of the *Grām Panchāyet*) may also take part in the discussions of the *Panchāyet*.

The *Grām Panchāyet* of an Orāon village can exert its influence only over the people of its jurisdiction, and cannot deal with any matter involving a person of another village, even though the matter also concerns a member of its own village, but has to refer the matter to the *Panchāyet* of the other village concerned.

The *Grām-Panchāyet* acts as a group, and its decisions are given on the basis of votes of the members. The *Rājmorāl* or the *Mantri* cannot decide a dispute on the basis of their opinion; they have to count on the opinions of the other members also.

The following types of disputes are now-a-days generally dealt with by the *Grām-Panchāyet* of the Orāons of this area:—

1. Disputes between persons of either sex involved in assault.
2. Grievances of persons of either sex regarding land.
3. Disputes on the occasion of marriage.
4. Cases of love between tribal boys and girls.
5. Breach of social rules, norms etc.

When any of the above-mentioned disputes arises in the village, the case is first referred to the *Mantri*, who later puts the case before the *Rājmorāl*, who discusses it with the *Mantri* and a few other members of the *Grām Panchāyet*. After a preliminary discussion, a date is fixed for the final hearing. The *Panchāyet* also asks the *Mantri* to inform the parties involved in the dispute and also the other members of the village *Panchāyet* and other elderly persons of the village to assemble in a fixed place on a fixed date. Accordingly, the *Mantri* sends the *Choukidār* for communicating the information to different categories of personnel.

On the fixed date, the personnel concerned assemble in the house of the *Mantri* or of any of the members of the village *Panchāyet* as previously decided. The meeting of the *Panchāyet* is generally held towards the evening hours when the persons are free from any work.

When the *Rājmorāl*, *Mantri* and all the members of the *Panchāyet* and also the parties concerned assemble in the meeting, the *Mantri* narrates in detail the case to the *Panchāyet*. Thereafter, the witnesses of both the parties are examined one after another, and the members of the *Panchāyet* judge the facts, and communicate their views to the *Rājmorāl* who on the basis of the opinions shared by the majority of the members gives his verdict on behalf of the *Panchāyet*. The *Panchāyet* generally tries at first to settle the dispute by mutual compromise between the two parties. Sometimes a fine is also imposed on the offending party which is generally made in terms of *hāndiā* (rice-beer) or money, which is used to satisfy the thirst of the members of the village *Panchāyet* and also for the aggrieved party. In a very rare case when the guilt is unpardonable on the part of the society, excommunication is resorted to.

If any dispute arises between the *Rājmorāl* and another person, the *Mantri* presides over the *Grām Panchāyet*, and judges the case with the help of other members of the village *Panchāyet*, in the same way as described above.

If the *Rājmorāl* and the *Mantri* are involved in any dispute, one of the elderly members of the *Grām Panchāyet* takes the chair for deciding the case.

With the introduction of the new *Panchāyet Rāj* System (Village Self-Government) some changes in the indigenous village organisation are apprehended (though in most of the areas of Sunderban, the full-fledged *Panchāyet Rāj* System has not yet started). In this new system, every village would have its own *Gram-Savā* consisting of an *Adhakshya* (Head of the *Gram-Savā*), an *Upādhakshya* (Assistant Head of the *Gram Savā*) and a number of *Panchāyets* (members). All the officials and members are elected by the villagers. The *Adhakshya* generally presides over the meeting. The meeting is generally convened by the *Adhakshya* after discussing with the other members.

In Chotā-Nāgpur also the village *Panchāyet* (*Pānch*) exists in Orāon villages. "The common will of the community is, when required expressed by the village *Panch*, which in

theory includes the entire village community but in practice is represented by the village-elders", (Roy: 1915: 406). The *Pānch* consists of a headman or *Māhāto*, assistant headman or *Pānbharā* or *Pujār* or *Tāhālū*, the village priest or *Pāhān* and a number of elderly persons as members.

In this area disputes about partition of property, certain offences against marriage, suspected cases of witchcraft, and sometimes even cases of assault and theft etc. are generally judged by the *Pānch*.

Among the Orāons of Ranchi district, in most of the villages, the office of the *Māhāto* is hereditary, but other members of *Pānch* are generally elected. Sometimes the *Pānch* officials have to take oath before the full session of the *Pānchāyet*.

The procedures observed in connection with a case are quite similar to that of the Orāons of Sunderban area.

Further, among the Ranchi Orāons also, the influence of the *Pānch* over the villagers has decreased much. Many of the villagers at present are refusing to accept the verdict of the *Pānch*.

"In cases of tort and crime, fine and excommunication are the only penalties that the Panch may now-a-days inflict. In cases of alleged witchcraft, however, persons adjudged guilty have been known to have been severely thrashed and driven out, bag and baggage, from the village, and sometimes even beaten to death." (Roy : 1928 : 407).

The *Pārḥā-Pānch* decides the cases against sexual taboo or *caste* taboo which are required to be punished with excommunication while village *Pānch* decides offences against other taboos.

Previously, *Pānch* or private individuals used to practise ordeals in order to detect the guilt or innocence of an accused person. In these cases, a person suspected of theft, was asked to dip his arm in a boiling hot mixture of cow-dung and water. It was believed that if he was guilty, his arm would get scalded, otherwise it would come out unscathed. Sometimes a small ladleful of burning charcoal was kept on the palm of

the accused person in order to detect whether he was guilty or innocent.

Now-a-days, the above-mentioned types of ordeals for finding out the faults have generally fallen into disuse in many of the Orāon villages of Ranchi. In the Sunderban area, ordeals are never practised for the purpose.

Almost similar types of *Panchāyets* exist among the different castes and communities of Sunderban tract. The headman of the *Panchāyet* is known as *Moral*, who judges the village disputes with the help of the members of the *Panchāyet*.

PĀRHĀ PANCHĀYET

“In time the villages felt the necessity of working together in larger wholes for purposes of self-protection against natural and supernatural foes. And, as a result, arose the *Pārhā* organisation modelled on the old Orāon hunting groups though formed not upon the principle of association of kindred but upon the basis of local contiguity”. (Roy : 1915 : 413).

Previously, the Orāons of Sunderban had full-fledged *Pārhā* Federation like their kinsmen in Ranchi district, but at present its function has almost become extinct. When members of two or more villages used to be involved in disputes, the *Pārhā-Panchāyet* was approached for the decision. The *Pārhā-Panchāyet* consisted of a number of villages (not fixed), each of which was to be represented by the *Rāj̄moral* or *Mantri* or a selected member of the *Panchāyet* of the village concerned. Unlike the *Pārhā Pānch* of Ranchi district, where one of the villages is called *Rāj̄ā* (King) village, another the *Dewān* (Prime Minister) village, a third *Pānrey*, (Clerk of the Crown) village etc., here in Sunderban one of the villages of the *Pārhā* was selected as the head of the *Pārhā Panchāyet* and the other villages as member villages. The *Rāj̄moral* of the Chairman village used to act as the head (*Morāl*) of the *Pārhā Panchāyet*. When disputes arose between two or more villages, these were referred to the head of the *Pārhā Panchāyet*, who used to convene a meeting in the same way as is done in the case of *Grām Panchāyet*. After hearing both sides, the decision of the

majority of the members was taken into consideration, and accordingly the head of the *Pārḥā Panchāyet* used to communicate the same. When the dispute between the Chairman village and other villages took place, a third village used to take the chair and handle the case accordingly.

The *Pārḥā Panchāyet* of this area had no emblem of its own as found in Ranchi area.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, among the Orāons, this sort of *Pārḥā* Federation was a major characteristic once upon a time. But now its functions have been much restricted even where it exists. Here, an Orāon *Pārḥā* consists of a number of villages of which one of the villages is called *Rājā* (King) village, another the *Dewān* (Prime Minister) village, a third the *Pānrey* (clerk of the Crown) village, a fourth the *Kotwār* (Bailiff) village and so on. The headman of the *Rājā* village presides over the meetings of the *Pārḥā Pānch*. The *Pāhān* of this village is generally chosen to officiate as the *Kartāhā* at a social or socio-religious ceremony of the *Pārḥā Pānch*. Sometimes there is a separate *Kartāhā* village, and the *Pāhān* of this village acts as the officiator in the socio-religious festivities of the *Pārḥā*. The *Māhāto* or the headman of the *Kotwār* village officiates as the *Kotwār* of the *Pārḥā*, who ordinarily carries an iron spear with a bamboo handle or a thick bamboo-pole to a *Pārḥā* meeting as an insignia of his office. Every village of the *Pārḥā* has its own distinctive flag and other badges, and some *Pārḥās* have their own distinctive methods of playing drum. The establishment and maintenance of law and order, and the settlement of disputes between one village and another within its jurisdiction are also the main functions of the *Pārḥā Pānch*.

Previously, different ordeals were practised by the *Pārḥā Pānch* in order to detect a crime. In the olden times, villages of different *Pārḥā* came to an inter-*Pārḥā* alliance, known as *Dudh-bhāyā*. "A *Dūdḥ-bhāyā* village of a *Pārḥā*, is a village which, though belonging to a different *Pārḥā*, entered in the days of tradition into a ceremonial alliance with another *Pārḥā* of which it thus became a *Dūdḥ-bhāyā* (i.e. milk-brother) or foster-brother" (Roy: 1915: 429-430).

At present, the State Government of West Bengal is

trying to establish in rural areas, the new *Panchāyet* system at the *Anchal* level (*Anchal Panchāyet*) comprising of several villages, each of which would send an elected representative to the *Anchal Panchāyet* for representing it. The functionaries of an *Anchal Panchāyet* are (i) a *Pradhān* (Chairman) (ii) *Upapradhān* (Vice-Chairman), (iii) A Secretary, (iv) A Choukidār and (v) Members. The *Pradhān* and *Upapradhān* would be elected from the members of the *Anchal Panchāyet*, whereas, the Secretary will be a paid Government servant.

Anchal Panchāyets of similar type are being organised in the Ranchi area also.

Besides the above-mentioned *Panchāyets*, the disputes are sometimes now-a-days settled by the different Government and other agencies working for their uplift and welfare. These tribals, at present, approach law-courts also for having their disputes settled.

The recent move of the State Government to establish formal *Panchāyet* systems at village and *Anchal* levels is expected to succeed well in this area amongst the Orāons as they were accustomed to organise such *Panchāyets* in their own way at different levels, which, however, had no legal status to enforce their decisions, but the organisations of the present set-up, would be in a better position in this respect on account of being backed by official recognition.

CHAPTER VIII

MAGICO-RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The religious beliefs and practices of the present-day Orāons of Sunderban may be characterised as polytheistic. These beliefs and practices bear the imprints of numerous alien influences, and a number of these show the distinct reflections of the local Hindu religious conceptions. Regarding the magic and religion as practised by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, T. C. Hodson ³⁴ writes, "These are features in their intellectual beliefs, their traditional beliefs, their tacitly assumed and unquestioned beliefs, which—apart from resemblances due to the common elements of the universal pattern—are unmistakably borrowed from their Mūṇḍā or Hindu neighbours".

The Orāon system of belief and practice, doctrine and behaviour "have gradually evolved and organised to face the unknown supernatural world and restore confidence to the mind of the community and the individual when it is shaken by crises and dangers....." (Roy : 1928 : 1)

The Orāon religious structure may be said to be a system of animism or rather spiritism having a background of primitive and vague animatism, in which no discrimination is done between the soul or spirit and its abode, and the attribution of an impersonal magic force is made among some living beings and certain objects of external nature as also among objects of human art. Regarding religion proper, their attitude

towards the supernatural "is one of reverential fear in the presence of mysterious supernatural powers and beings, and dependence on and conciliation and propitiation of and prayerful submission to them, and the result expected is averting the ill-will and securing the good-will of the supernatural beings, and good luck to man in crops and cattle, health and progeny" and on the other hand [their attitude towards magic "is mainly one of the defiance of and control and domination over impersonal mysterious powers, and the result intended is the expulsion of evil or compulsion of natural or supernatural forces and powers in the production of desired favourable conditions or results such as good weather or rain". (Roy : 1928 : 3).

Though the Orāons are believers in the natural and supernatural powers and agencies, and recognise and appreciate these as they are modelling human destiny and desire to utilise them for their (Orāons') benefit, still, they do not assign all the natural phenomena and all the good and evil of life to the spiritualism concerning personal and impersonal forces, ghosts, deities etc. They realise that sometimes the natural causes and conditions and human efforts and activities, may cause some incidents which apparently appear to be unnatural and caused by spiritual influence. Their primitive environment compelled them to form their magic and religion as supplements and parts of their religious structure, though the religion did not actually supplant the magic as in their society, the religion is essentially the business of the community but the magic is the business of the specialists.

But this magico-religious structure has, in these days been somewhat slackened due to the impregnation of some puritanistic religious ideas which have entered due mostly to the contact with those people bearing the reformed idealism, and also to some extent due to migration to such places where evolved and forceful religious ideologies prevail. These puritanistic religious beliefs and practices have enriched the religious core of their society, and as a result, the reverential fear for the mysterious supernatural powers and beings has somewhat been toned down and controlled, and thus the faith on these has to some extent become slackened.

In their original homeland (i.e., in Chotā-Nāgpur), Christianity and *Bhagatism* are two puritanical themes which have changed their outlook from their primitive magico-religious life.

With the opening of the Gossner's Evangelical Lutheran Mission in 1885, the Christian Missionaries started their work in Ranchi district. Gradually they spread their tentacles in different areas, even in most out of the way places among the tribals, and rendered valuable services to them by establishing schools, hospitals, co-operative credit societies etc., and through these operations, they started preaching the gospels of Christianity, and ultimately converted a large mass of the tribals into Christianity. Along with the change of religion, the converted Orāons fashioned their outlook into a new script of ideology, which forbade them to preserve their old and traditional beliefs and customs. These baptised people, at present, have little faith in their old magico-religious rites, and are practising their new mode of religion.

The same is the case with *Bhagatism* which is governed by the Hindu influence. Of this new religious movement, *Ṛṣi-Bhagat*, *Nemhā-Bhagat*, *Visnu-Bhagat*, *Kabirpanāhi Bhagat*, *Ṭānā Bhagat*, etc. are important initiators. The followers of this movement do not drink any kind of intoxicating liquor, and also abstain from unclean habits. Most of them pay their homage to *Mahādeo* the Great God, and do not propitiate the evil spirits, and also refrain from believing in the magical rites and rituals. Though the *modus operandi* of animism is not totally abolished from the *Bhagatism*, still it is true that this new movement brought some fresh changes in their old superstitious life.

When these Orāons came down to and settled in the Sunderban area, they found themselves in a newer ethnic environment with a well-set and distinct religious structure. In course of time, as their link with their homeland ceased, and their contact with the neighbouring people thickened, they began to supplant their old version of religion and magic by adopting newer traits from the neighbouring Hindu society. At present, they arrange for the worship of the Hindu deities.

like *Nārāyaṇa*, *Saraswatī*, *Lakṣmī* and others by Hindu Brahmin priests, and have practically forgotten the worship of a good bit of their traditional deities. Now-a-days during *Chāḍak* festival in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April), when *Gāḍan* of Lord *Tārekswar* takes place, some of them even take to the Hindu practice of observing *Sanyās* of Lord *Tārakeswar* (Lord *Siva*) and paying homage (*Hatyā*) before Him, wearing clothing dyed with red ochre. Still, these people have retained, to some extent, their traditional beliefs and practices modified and influenced by new environmental factors.

A. MAGICO-RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARIES

(i) *Village Priest (Pāhān)* : The priest among the Orāons of the Sunderban is known as *Pāhān*, *Ojhā* or *Neye* who is entrusted with the task of propitiation of the village deities, and is helped by an assistant generally known as *Bhakat*. The village priest's post is not hereditary in most of the cases, and he is generally selected on the basis of a person's efficiency in propitiating the village deities, and securing their grace in a substantial way. The existing priest in Sunderban Orāon society usually continues functioning till he is disabled or dead. The most efficient and active one among the disciples of the village priest is generally earmarked as the future priest of the village. As the son of the priest gets more opportunities to learn his father's speciality than other disciples, in some villages of this area of Sunderban, the priest's son is chosen as the next priest. The Sunderban Orāons have not got the system of having their new priest picked out by a supernatural process (as is the practice with the Ranchi Orāons described below).

In Ranchi district among the Orāons, the office of the village priest (*Pāhān*) in a few of the villages is hereditary, but in most of the cases the incumbent is changed once in three years. The successor is selected by a supposed supernatural process of election, which the Orāons call, "selected by the deities themselves" In this 'supernatural' process of election, a blindfolded boy is supposed to be led by the *Sarna* spirit

sitting on the *sup* (winnowing fan which is the emblem of *Pāhān's* office) to the house of the person to whom the deity takes a fancy. Reaching the house of that person, the blind-folded boy keeps the *Sarna-sup* on the door-way of his house. Thus, he is regarded as picked out for the *Pāhānship*, and is accepted as such by the villagers.

Even in cases, where the *Pāhānship* is hereditary, if the family of the *Pāhān* becomes extinct or apostate, the election of the new *Pāhān* follows the same procedure.

(ii) *Assistant to the priest*—(*Bhakat*) : The *Pāhān* or *Ojhā* generally selects his assistant, known as *Bhakat*, from those persons of the village who have interest and some efficiency in the magico-religious activities. The *Bhakat* generally helps the priest in the arrangement of household and village festivals. He also cleans the village *Thān* (altar) regularly, and procures articles for different types of *pujās* etc.

The assistant of the *Pāhān* or the village priest in Ranchi is usually called *Pānbharā* ; but in some villages, he is also known as *Susāri*, *Murgi-pākoā* etc.

(iii) *Magician and Village Medicine-man* (*Mati* and *Gunin*) : Among the Sunderban Orāons, the village magician is known as *Mati* and the medicine man as *Gunin*, and in some villages where only one of these functionaries exists, he functions in both the spheres. Generally, these functionaries from their boyhood, have to undergo an elaborate training programme under the guidance of a *Guru* (Master), who trains them in necessary rites and penances, incantations and spells, and also teaches them the techniques of the magic art, the methods of treatment of diseases and spirit possession etc. They not only perform divination but also can neutralise the ill effects of the evil eye, and exorcize and pacify different types of spirits, with the offerings and sacrifices etc.

In Chotā-Nāgpur also, the Orāons have *Māti*, *Ojhā* and/or *Deonrā*, who are magicians and medicinemen, and have to undergo similar types of training as that of the Orāons of Sunderban area. Besides these functionaries, the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur have also *Bhagaṭ* or *Sokhā* who "feels called to the profession by psychic temperament inducing a vision of the

god *Mahādeo* or some other god or spirit' (Roy : 1928 : 11) and he finds out through his mediumistic powers, the name of witch or sorcerer who has set up some spirit or other to cause any sickness or other calamity, and the sacrifices demanded by the spirit so set up.

B. ALTAR OF THE VILLAGE DEITIES (GRĀM THĀN):

In the Sunderban area, the Orāons have no temple as that of the Hindus, but have village *Thān* i.e. sacred spot marked for the village deities. In many villages these Orāons are also seen to attend the village temples of the Hindus during special *pujā* days of the Hindus, such as *Kālī pujā* or *Durgā pujā* etc., but they do not get any opportunity to take active part therein. Each village or the hamlet of a village of the Orāons has at least one village *Thān*. A typical Orāon village *Thān* is described below :—

The village *Thān*—the place of worship for the village deities is generally situated in the centre of the vilage, and is regularly cleaned and plastered with cowdung paste by the Assistant of the *Pāhān*. There is an earthen platform in the middle of the *Thān* on which there are a number of earthen balls, each of which represents a particular deity of the village. Generally, the number of earthen balls vary from five to nine. For example, in the *Thān* of the hamlet *Pārsemāri* of the village *Boyārmāri* there are nine earthen balls and two earthen cones, and of these nine earthen balls, seven are placed on the earthen platform representing the following deities (1) *Gangā Devi*, (2) *Devimāi*, (3) *Laksmi*, (4) *Saraswati*, (5) *Kālī*, (6) *Kāmākshyā Chandi* and (7) *Sitalā*. The other two balls are situated a little away from the earthen platform on the northern side under the *Jhākrā*-tree (a species of *Bāblā* or *Acacia*) and represent :—

(1) *Jhākrāburiā*, *Dākinī* and *Jogini*,

(2) *Banbibī*, *Dakṣin Roy* and *Kālu Roy*.

The two earthen cones are situated on two lateral sides of the earthen platform, and represent *Mahādev* and *Manasā* respectively.

A little away from each corner of the platform, four small posts with flags are planted and tied with one another by means of red threads. In the middle, a large flag, known as village flag, is hoisted which is a little away from the far-side of the earthen platform. It remains separate, not tied with other flags by means of thread.

In the middle of the near-side of the platform, there is a semi-circular protrusion for keeping a green coconut on an earthen pot (*Ghat*) and an earthen lamp. The *Bāblā* tree (*Acacia*) represents the tree for *Jhākrāburiā* and also for *Ban-bibi*. Sometimes, a few *Tulsi* plants (*Basil*) can also be seen near the *Thān*.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, most of the Orāon villages are devoid of temples excepting a few where the Orāons have built temple-lets imitating the Hindus. In these villages, sheds (rectangular, two or four sloped, mudwalled and with country tiled roof) are erected for *Devī Māi* or Mother-Goddess, who is apparently a deity borrowed from the Hindus. On an earthen platform in the miniature temple, there are a few earthen cones which represent the breasts of the Mother-Goddess. Besides this temple of *Devī-Māi*, they also have one or more *Sāl* (*Shorea robusta*) groves or one or more solitary trees, constituting the shrine of the village deities. Some villages have particular stones which symbolise certain Orāon deities (e.g. *Chāndi*), and also wooden *Khuntās* or pegs with bits of iron nails pinned on the top which mark the seat of Orāon ghosts or human spirits.

C. DEITIES, SPIRITS AND OTHER SUPERNATURAL AGENCIES:

The Orāons of Southern Bengal, in their polytheistic religious structure, recognise a number of deities, spirits and other supernatural agencies, which may be put under the following two broad categories; —

(a) Deities, spirits etc. which have still persisted from their traditional culture e.g. *Dharma* or *Bhagwān*, *Devī-Māi*, *Gāondeoti*, *Jhākrāburiā* etc.

(b) Deities, spirits etc, which have been borrowed from the neighbouring castes and communities such as *Kāli*, *Manasā*, *Sitalā*, *Banbibī*, *Daksin Roy* etc.

Further, these borrowed Hindu deities of the Orāons of Sunderban may again be divided into two sub-categories :—

- (i) Deities universally accepted by the Hindus such as *Kāli*, *Manasā*, *Sitalā*, *Durgā*, *Laksmī*, *Saraswātī* and others.
- (ii) Deities specially developed in the Sunderban area such as :— *Daksin Roy* (God of the tigers), *Kālu Roy* (God of the crocodiles), *Banbibī* (Lady of the forest), *Badar Sāheb* (Saint of the river), etc.

Of these different types of deities, spirits etc., some are regarded with more reverence than others. These different deities of the Orāons of this area of Sunderban may be classified as follows :—

- (I) Supreme God i.e. *Dharma* or *Bhagwān*, the Creator of the Universe.
- (II) Mother-Goddess or *Mā Kāli*.
- (III) Tutelary deities and spirits, such as *Kāli*, *Sitalā*, *Manasā*, *Devi Māi*, *Jhākrāburiā* etc.
- (IV) Ancestor spirits or *Burā Burī*.
- (V) Deity of the village or *Gāon deoti*.
- (VI) Class deities such as *Tusu Thākur* etc.
- (VII) Territorial deities such as *Daksin Roy*, *Kālu Roy*, *Badar Sāheb*, *Banbibī* etc.
- (VIII) Evil spirits such as *Churī*!, *Petni* etc.
- (IX) Evil forces, such as evil eye (*najar*), evil touch (*chhuā*) etc.

The deities, spirits etc. of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur have been divided into the following ten classes by Roy :—

- (I) The highest divinity i.e. the *Dharmes* or the Supreme being who is the Creator of the Universe.
- (II) Spirits of the dead ancestors known as *Pāchba'tar*.
- (III) Tutelary deities and spirits—Some of these are regarded as *Deotās* or Gods and the others as *Bhuts* or Ghosts. Examples of the former type are *Pāt Rājā*, *Chālā Pāchcho* or *Sarnā Burhiā* and *Devi Māi*,

and those of latter type are *Dārḥā*, *Desāuli* and *Mahādāniā* and others.

- (IV) Class spirits—examples of which are *Chāndi*, *Achrael* and *Jodā*.
- (V) *Khunt Bhuts* of each different *Khunt* of the original founder of a village.
- (VI) Household spirits known as *Bārndā* and *Chigrinād* or *Dāhā Chigri*.
- (VII) Mystic powers residing in or connected with certain objects or symbols, such as the *Jātrā Khuntā*, village flags, totem symbols, certain musical instruments etc.
- (VIII) Tramp or stray spirits such as *Muā*, *Mā'ech* and *Churil*.
- (IX) Familiar spirits or *Pugri* or *Bhuts* of individuals who secretly offer sacrifices to such spirits for their own private ends.
- (X) Forces of evil known as the evil eye (*najary*), evil mouth (*baibhāk*) and evil touch (*chhut*) etc.

In this connection, it may here be mentioned that the Christian Orāons and the *Bhagat* Orāons have their respective deities, and they have very little faith in these original Orāon deities, spirits etc.

The Hindus of Deltaic Bengal, like those of other areas of West Bengal, also have different deities, spirits etc. which consist of supreme divinity, tutelary deities, class deities etc.

It is seen from the above that the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur and those of Sunderban have different types of deities, spirits, supernatural powers etc., having different gradations. In this connection, Roy writes, "Indeed, tradition asserts that the earlier religion of the Orāons centred round Supreme Spirit or the Spirit of Good on the one hand, and, on the other hand, round the 'evil eye' and the 'evil mouth'.....and the malice of a witch or sorcerer are to this day of greater concern to the Orāon than the gods and spirits" (1928 : 18).

Further, among the Orāons of both the areas, we can see a good deal of intrusion of the deities etc. of Hindu culture, but it may be noticed that in their homeland the Orāons (with

the exception of the Christians and the *Bhagats*) have even, at the present day, retained a good deal of their traditional deities and spirits etc. But in the flood-ridden region of Deltaic Bengal, the picture is quite different. Here the Hindu deities have so much been borrowed by the immigrant Orāons that their traditional deities etc. have almost been overshadowed by them. Further, these Orāons have forgotten a good many of their traditional deities and spirits, and many even cannot name their Supreme Deity.

A detailed account of each of these deities, spirits etc. is given below :—

1. TRADITIONAL ORĀON DEITIES, SPIRITS ETC.

The Orāons, of Sunderban at present have a few deities of their own culture, and the forthcoming paragraphs will deal with these deities only and not with those traditional Orāon divinities that have been discarded or forgotten by the immigrant Orāons but still retained by the Orāons of Ranchi district.

1. SUPREME GOD :

The Orāons of this area of Sunderban have faint idea regarding their traditional Supreme God. To them the Supreme Deity is known as *Dharma* or *Suraj Deotā* i.e. Sun God, and they also call him *Bhagwān* like the Hindus of the locality. To the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, the Supreme God is known as *Dharmes* or *Biri-Belās* i.e. Sun God, and the Hinduised Orāons of this region also call him, *Bhagwān* like the Hindus and the Orāons of the Sunderban area. The Supreme Deity is often recognised as the Sun God and “the Sun is still sometimes referred to as the visible symbol, if not actual representation, of Dharmes” (Roy : 1928 : 19). Regarding the Supreme Deity of the Orāons, Rev. P. Dehon³⁵ writes, “When they use *Dharmes* the idea of god is entirely separated from the Sun, whilst while they use *Bhagwan* they naturally look to the Sun as the Kols do.” Contradicting this opinion of Dehon, Roy³⁶ says, “When the Sun is particularly meant, the term used by the Orāons is either *Biri* or *Suruj* or *Suruj Bhagwān* (the Sun God) but never simply *Bhagwān*”.

In connection with the Orāon religion, Dalton³⁷ states, "like Mundas, they acknowledge a Supreme God, adored as *Dharme* or *Dharmes*, the *Holy one*, who is manifest in the Sun."

The Orāons in their story of the genesis of Man and the Spirits, have related the Hindu goddess *Pārvatī* (the consort of *Lord Siva*) or *Sitā* (the wife of *Rāmāyan* hero, *Rāmachandra*) as the wife of *Dharmes*.

The Sunderban Orāons, in general, have very faint conception regarding their Supreme God. Only the priest and a few elderly persons can give some idea regarding *Dharma*. According to them their Supreme God has neither any shape nor any figure. He is Almighty and the Creator of this Universe. He sees everything, judges all the actions of every living being and rewards and punishes accordingly. All human beings, animals, birds etc., and all inanimate objects are his subjects. He is brighter than everything, purer than anything, and he is the God of Gods. In most important *pūjās* and festivals, he is worshipped first of all, and first offering and sacrifice are also made to him. As his colour is white, objects of white colour are offered or sacrificed to him. This *Dharma* or *Dharamrājā* has another younger brother known as '*Karam Rājā*' who is worshipped during *Karam* festival.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, *Dharmes* is regarded as the white-colour Supreme Deity, and is also generally offered sacrifices of white coloured animals. Generally, an Orāon turns his face to the east—the direction of the rising Sun, when he offers something to *Dharma*. These Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur also believe that *Dharmes* controls the other gods and spirits and sees all that the men and the spirits do, and knows all that they think. When somebody breaks the customary law of morality, he is sure to be punished by *Dharmes*. "The Orāon regards him as anterior to all, the Author and Preserver, Controller and Punisher of men, gods and spirits—of all that exists in the visible and invisible universe". (Roy : 1928 : 23). He is regarded as a benevolent deity.

Among the Orāons of both the areas, no miniature temple or any other special structure is erected for the Supreme deity, not even any particular abode is meant for him. Though in

different festivals *Dharma* or *Dharmes* is paid homage, "the only ceremony in which *Dharmes* alone is invoked and in which sacrifice is offered to Him alone is the *Dāṇḍā-Kāttā* (tooth-breaking) or *Bhelwa-phāri*, (*Bhelwa*-twig splitting) ceremony" (Roy : 1928 : 24). This ceremony is regarded as prescribed by the *Dharmes* himself, and through this ceremony they approach the supernatural powers for security from evil.

The Christian Orāons, following the Christian ideas consider *God, the Holy Father* as the Supreme Deity. The Hindu castes and communities generally conceive of the Supreme God in three forms—*Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu*, and *Maheśwar*, the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer respectively.

2. DEVI MĀI :

In the life of the Orāons of estuarine areas of Bengal, the role of *Devi Māi* is insignificant. She has an abode at the village *Thān*, and is worshipped along with other deities and spirits during *Grām-pujā*. Originally this deity was borrowed by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur from their Hindu neighbours and regarded by them as *Mother-Goddess*. In many Orāon villages of Chotā-Nāgpur, a two or four sloped thatched house with rectangular ground plan, which looks like a miniature temple, is meant for *Devi Māi*, or sometimes by the side of a *Palās* tree (*Butea frondosa*) the *Devi-āsthān* or *Devi manda* is erected. "The only symbols that may be seen in the *Devi-māṇḍā* are three, five, or seven lumps of earth in the form of small cones to represent what are regarded as the breasts of Mother-goddess". (Roy : 1928 : 53). This idea of Mother-goddess and the symbolic representation of her breasts with earthen cones are the original Orāon conceptions. In the *Dhumkurias* (bachelor's dormitory) of many Orāon villages of Chotā-Nāgpur, there is a wooden plank in which female breasts are carved "and there are reasons to believe that these as well as the representation of the female organ or *yoni* on one of the wooden posts supporting the roof in most *Dhūmkuriā* houses, originally represented the Mother-goddess". (Roy : 1928 : 53).

Devi Māi generally looks after the welfare of the vil-

lagers and protects them from the outbreak of different diseases etc.

3. JHĀKRĀ BURI :

In Orāon pantheon of the Sunderban area, *Jhākrā Buri* like *Debi Māi*, is also another traditional Orāon deity which has no importance in their present-day socio-religious life. She is represented by an earthen ball; and a *Bāḷā* (Acacia) tree or sapling is considered to be her abode. She is worshipped like *Devi Māi* during *Grām Pujā* along with all the other village deities.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, the *Jhākrā Burhiā*, better known as *Sarnā-Burhiā*, is also known as "*Chālā Pāchcho*" or the 'Old Lady of the Grove' by the Orāons, and she is considered to be the chief of the divinities.

"She is the most popular of Orāon deities and receives sacrifices attended with the most elaborate ritual at the annual spring festival known as the *Khāddi* or *Sārhi* held in her honour. The most friendly and sociable among the Orāon deities and spirits, she rejoices when the Orāon is happy and seeks to share their happiness with them" (Roy: 1928: 42-43). The priest and his family members in Chotā-Nāgpur always offer rice-beer from each pot of beer to *Jhākrā Burhiā* before drinking it, and the ordinary Orāons offer 'the first fruit of the field' to her. But in the Sunderban area, the Orāons offer 'the first fruit of the year' (Mango) and 'the first fruit of the field' (Paddy) to their ancestors (*Burā Buri*) and not to *Jhākrā Burhiā* as is done by the Ranchi Orāons.

Sometimes *Jhākrā Burhiā* appears in the dreams of the Orāons (of Chotā-Nāgpur) in the shape of an old woman with matted locks of white hair, and the Orāons of Sunderban also think *Jhākrā Burhiā* to be an 'Old Lady'.

There is a sacred compartment known as *Chālā-Kutti* in the houses of the Orāon Pāhāns of Chotā-Nāgpur where the *old woman* resides and takes her seat on a sacred winnowing basket known as *Chālā-keter* or *Sarnā Sup* to which

a sacred knife (*Chā'ā-kanto*) is attached. But these are not present among the Orāons of flood-ridden area of Deltaic Bengal.

In every Orāon village in Chotā-Nāgpur, there is a grove of *Sāl* (*Shorea robusta*) trees, known as *Chātā* or *Sarnā* which is regarded as the abode of this deity. Sometimes instead of *Sāl*, other trees like *Aswatha* (*Ficus Religiosa*), *Bat* (*Ficus Bengalensis*) etc. are also regarded as her abode. This deity is regarded by both Sunderban as well as Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons as the nature deity representing the spirit of vegetation. Further, in Sunderban also the abode of the deity is represented by a solitary tree of *Bāb'ā* (*Acacia*) or a number of *Bāblā* (*Acacia*) or other trees.

She is also worshipped here for the welfare of the village.

4. BURĀ BURI

The ancestral spirits among the Orāons of Sunderban are known as *Burāburi* and have their abode by the side of the hearth of each household. During *Āsrīā* festival in the month of *Āswār* (June-July), *Nawā-khāni* festival in the month of *Bhādro* (August-September) and also during *Sārhu* festival in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April), these ancestral spirits are worshipped. These Orāons offer them 'the first fruit of the field' (paddy) during *Nawā-khāni* festival and 'the first fruit of the year' (Mango) during the *Sārhu* festival. They believe that their ancestral spirits always look after their welfare and often guard the sick-beds of their descendants.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur believe that "The soul of a deceased Orāon is believed to enter into the community of the *Pāch-bālar* or ancestor-spirits on the annual *Kohā-Benjā* (great marriage) or *Hārboyā* (bone-drowning) day....." (Roy:1928:29). Regarding the residence of the ancestral spirits of a clan, the Orāons of Ranchi district believe that these spirits live in an underground settlement of their own, near their village *Kundi*. They believe that these spirits "sometimes appear and speak to their living relatives in their

dreams, watch over them in their sickness, and often foil the attempts of other spirits to do them harm." (Roy: 1928 31).

The Orāons of both areas further believe that these ancestor-spirits can transform themselves into any shape they desire, and go wherever and whenever they like, apace as air. They can also appear before their descendants in the disguise of any living object they like.

The *Hārborā* ceremony (a kind of "All soul's Feast") is a special religious ceremony among the Orāons of Ranchi district in which offerings and sacrifices are made solely to the ancestral spirits, though the living relatives of these ancestral spirits invoke them with offerings at every feast and on every suitable occasion. Both in Ranchi and in Deltaic Bengal, an orthodox Orāon is seen to set apart a few grains of boiled rice in the name of his deceased ancestor before he starts eating, as a "token of gratitude to their ancestor-spirits who, they say, have been providing food and clothing for their descendants and thus enabling them to continue their line". (Roy: 1928: 33).

The *Pulkhi* or the memorial stones, present in some of the Orāon villages of Ranchi district are considered to be the visible symbols of the ancestral spirits of each clan.

So, from the above discussions we find that the Orāons of the Sunderban area still have retained some traditional beliefs regarding their ancestor-spirits, though they do not believe in the residence of the ancestral spirits in an underground settlement near the place where the bones of the dead are finally deposited, and they also do not practise *Hārborā* (bone-drowning) or *Kohā-Benjā* (Great Marriage) ceremony, nor even erect any memorial stone in respect of the ancestors as is done by the Ranchi Orāons.

5. GĀON-DEOTI

It is one of the family deities, worshipped in the month of *Āswar* (June-July) during morning hours. It is a female deity and is responsible for the welfare of the family. Some Orāons of this area (including the *Ojhā* or the priest) are

of opinion that this deity was brought from the original village of their homeland (Chotā-Nāgpur) by the first batch of the Orāon migrants, and consider this deity as the deity of the ancestral village. Roy is of opinion that by *Gāon-deotī* most of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur mean *Devi-Māi* and some *Chālā Pāchcho*. This deity subdues different evil spirits.

During the preliminaries of a marriage, *Gāon-deotī* is worshipped by the Orāons of both the places, whereas the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons pour libation of rice-beer on the ground to the *Gāon-deotī* during *Gundāri dhukna* rite of the marriage. At the time of *Sārhu* festival and also during the performances of some magical rites an Orāon *Māti* of Ranchī propitiates the *Gāon Deotī*.

6. GOREYĀ

He is considered to be the god of cattles by the tribal folk of this area of estuarine Bengal. He lives in cowshed. These people also believe that *Goreyā* has a shape of a cow having two large horns, but sometimes he also appears in human figure. The *Goreyā* is represented during his worship in the month of *Vādro* (Aug-Sept) by a branch of *Garān* tree. He is worshipped for the welfare of the cattle.

Among the Orāons of Ranchi district *Goensāli Nād* or *Gohar Deotā* or *Gonreā* is considered to be the tutelary spirit of the cattle of each Orāon family and the worship of this spirit is accompanied by the sacrifice of a fowl. During *Soharāi* festival, the Orāons of both the places anoint the foreheads and horns of their cattle with the paste of vermilion and oil, and wash their hoofs and entertain them with delicious food. This *Soharāi* festival of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur is perhaps borrowed from the *Āhir* caste of the neighbourhood.

7. CHURIL

Churil is the spirit of a woman who died during pregnancy or child-birth. It is believed, that a *Churil* often runs

after and seeks to possess every man it comes in contact because of the unfulfilled desire in life, and for that it hankers for a mate of the opposite sex.

When a man happens to pass by the side of a pregnant woman's grave or that of a woman who died during delivery, it pursues him and goes on teasing and tormenting till the man becomes senseless. This teasing and tormenting bring sickness and even death unless a powerful *Maṭi* or *Gunin* saves his life by performing magical rites, which drive away the *Churil* from the body of the man. Besides this, it often tries to do harm to a pregnant woman by physical and mental tortures, and that is the reason why an expectant woman is not allowed to go out alone after dusk or pass by a grave.

In Chotā-Nāgpur also, a *Churil*, or *Churel* or *Mālech* is regarded as the ghost of a woman dying during pregnancy or child-birth or within a few days of delivery. It is said that a *Churil* spirit carries a load of coal on its head guessing it as a baby. In this plateau area also, the *Churil* is believed to do harm to a man or woman as in the case of Sunderban Orāons.

To get rid of this evil spirit, the Orāons of the Sunderban area bury the deadbody of a pregnant woman or a woman dying during childbirth, with face downward so that the spirit may go down below and can never come up. Further, iron nails are inserted in four corners of the grave to prevent the evil spirit from coming out of the grave and doing harm to the people.

In Chotā-Nāgpur plateau, mustard seeds are scattered on the way so that it cannot reach the village easily as it has to collect all the mustard seeds thus scattered, which is an impossible task. This is also done by the Sunderban Orāons for the same reason. The feet of the woman are also broken and turned backwards, and thorns are inserted into the soles of her feet so that it may not come out of the grave.

8. DARHĀ AND KUDRĀ

Darhā and *Kudrā* are the other two evil spirits recognised by the Orāons of Sunderban and are regarded by them as

very dreadful. They live in some obnoxious place. When a person happens to pass by such a place, where these spirits reside, they catch hold of him and bring sickness to that person. The *Gunin* or the *Mati* can cure such persons by exorcising these spirits.

But in the Chotā-Nāgpur area, *Darhā* is regarded by the Orāons as the most dreadful among the village spirits. "This spirit acts as the guard or gate-keeper of the village which it is believed to protect from the incursions of spirits from outside. It has its seat on a plot of upland known as *Dārkhā-tonkā* or *Dārkhā-tānr* situated on or near the boundary of every Orāon village" (Roy: 1928: 47). Generally the portion of land where *Darhā-tonka* is situated remains fallow. In some of the villages of Chotā-Nāgpur, *Darhā* is said to have his wife, a spirit, known as *Deswāli*, but in most of the villages, the Orāons consider *Darhā-Deswāli* as one and the same spirit. "Ordinarily", says Roy, "*Dārkhā* does no harm to the villagers but protects them from the incursions of outsider *bhūts*; but should there be any remissness on the part of the villagers in providing the spirit with the proper sacrifices at the appointed time, *Dārkhā* marks its displeasure by afflicting men or cattle with some terrible calamity; and elaborate and expensive sacrifices are then required to pacify it." (1928: 48).

Sometimes *Darhā* is incited by the *Dāins* (witch) or sorcerers to create trouble to the enemies of the *Dāins* etc. The *Darhā* is represented by a wooden stake planted into the ground at the *Darhā-tonka*.

II. DEITIES, SPIRITS, SUPERNATURAL AGENCIES ETC. BORROWED FROM THE LOCAL CASTES AND COMMUNITIES

(A) KALI

The most important deity of the Orāons of the Sunderban area is *Mā Kālī* who is considered here as the Mother-Goddess. She is worshipped as a family deity in the month of *Kārtick* (October-November) as well as a community deity

during *Grām Pujā* on the full-moon day of the month of *Agrāhayan* (December-Stage-I) and in the new-moon day of the month of *Āswār* (June-July-Stage-II). When the deity is worshipped at the family level, the head of the family acts as the priest and when it is done by the community as a whole i.e. during *Grām Pujā* the village priest performs the *pujā*. Further, *Kāli* (as a household deity) is generally worshipped particularly by those who have buffaloes, and this is done for the welfare of the animals, whereas when *Kāli* is worshipped on community level along with other deities, it is done for the welfare of the villagers. During this occasion, fowl is sacrificed. *Kāli* is worshipped by them in different names for the fulfilment of different purposes. A list of such names is given below:—

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) <i>Ākāsh Kāli</i> | Goddess of the Sky. |
| (2) <i>Pātāl Kāli</i> | Goddess of the Underground
(<i>PATAL</i>). |
| (3) <i>Purab Kāli</i> | Goddess of the East. |
| (4) <i>Paschim Kāli</i> | Goddess of the West. |
| (5) <i>Uttar Kāli</i> | Goddess of the North. |
| (6) <i>Daksin Kāli</i> | Goddess of the South. |
| (7) <i>Olā Kāli</i> | Goddess regulating Cholera. |
| (8) <i>Ban Kāli</i> or
<i>Bibi Kāli</i> | Goddess of the Wood. |
| (9) <i>Bāo Kāli</i> or
<i>Bātāsh Kāli</i> | Goddess of the Air. |
| (10) <i>Raksā Kāli</i> | Goddess who saves from Diseases
and Misereries. |
| (11) <i>Basanta Kāli</i> | Goddess checking Small Pox. |
| (12) <i>Ādhi Kāli</i> | Goddess of Darkness and so on. |

All of these are worshipped during the annual *Grām Bāndhā* festival. The image of *Kāli* is worshipped in a similar way as that of the Hindu *Kāli*.

In this connection, it may be mentioned that, like *Chandi*, variations in the forms of *Kāli* are also in existence among the Hindus. From the distinct religious ideology of different Pre-Aryan societies, as Bhattacharya³⁸ thinks, imitations of different deities like *Chandi*, were planned which

ultimately resulted in the formation of different deities titled *Kālī*, such as, *Bhadra Kālī*, *Raksā Kālī*, *Dakṣinā Kālī*, *Smaṣān Kālī*, *Nishī Kālī*, *Mahā Kālī*, *Unmatta Kālī* etc. Though all of these deities are added to the name of *Kālī*, still their origin and forms are different. The Orāons of Sunderban hold these different types of *Kālī* as part and parcel of *Mā Kālī* (Mother-Goddess) who by taking different forms, protects Her subjects from the hands of different spirits and evil things, who may impend from different directions and cause harm and danger to these people by creating calamities, diseases and deaths, of human beings and domestic animals.

These people also believe that *Siva* or *Mahādeva*, the husband of *Kālī*, is one of the trinity of the Hindu pantheon. Scholars like Bhattacharya³⁹ and others believe that these different forms of *Kālī* have originated at different times, but the original *Kālī* has Her marital relation with *Bhairawa-Siva* from very ancient times.

The Orāons of Sunderban have similar conception as that of the local Hindus regarding the image of *Kālī* (*Kālī*—the Mother Goddess) i.e. *Kālī* standing with one foot on the body of Lord *Siva*, Her husband, with weapons and heads of the *Asuras* (demons) in Her hands. She wears a garland of heads and parts of the bodies of the *Asuras*. This idea is quite similar to what has been stated in different Hindu Mythologies of comparatively later dates.

It has already been mentioned that the ordinary Orāons of Sunderban worship *Kālī* in family as well as in community level, and besides these it is also worshipped in individual level by an Orāon *Gunin* or *Mati* for warding off evil spirits.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, *Kālī Māi* or *Burhi Māi* is the tutelary deity of the *Mātis*. "She is said to have for her attendant a *Ranth* and a *Dānk* who act as bailiffs to seize and produce before their *Mistress* (*Kālī Māi*) any spirit that may be wanted." (Roy: 1928: 266). The *Mātis* offer sacrifices regularly to this Hindu deity, and on the day of *Ranth-Jātrā* in the month of *Āshān* (June-July), *Māti* constructs a *Pāṭ* or mud altar on which he plants an iron trident which symbolically

represents *Kālī Māi*. Thereafter, he propitiates this deity by offering a sacrificed red fowl and a black goat, and with a libation of rice-beer. In the month of *Kārtik* (October-November), the *Māti* again worships the *Kālī Māi* by sacrificing a black goat and offering its blood on the *pāt* or altar. Besides the worship of *Kālī Māi* by the *Mātis*, the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur do not worship the deity in family as well as in community level as is done by the Orāons of Southern Bengal.

The Hindu castes and communities of Deltaic Bengal also worship the different forms of *Kālī* at different times of the year.

It is, thus, apparent that the conception of the Mother-Goddess *Kālī* has been imbibed by the Orāons from the neighbouring Hindus. This is especially marked in the Deltaic Bengal as the worship of the Goddess *Kālī* is widely practised by the Bengalee Hindus.

(B) SITALA

Sitalā is another Hindu deity borrowed by the Orāons of the Sunderban area, and is worshipped in the month of *Phālgun* (February-March). She is also known as *Basanta Kālī* or, Goddess of Small Pox, and is worshipped for the protection of the village during an outbreak of Small-Pox. The conception prevalent among the Orāons of this area regarding the Goddess *Sitalā* is quite similar to that of the Hindus. Like the Hindus, they also believe that the *Ass* is the *Vāhana* (carrier) of this goddess.

In the Hindu folk legends, the Goddess *Sitalā* has been regarded as the presiding deity of Small-Pox and also savior from its attack. According to Bhattacharya⁴⁰, this deity is a non-Aryan one, and the description of the deity and also the method of worshipping her are quite distinct from Aryan ideology. Sastri⁴¹ is of opinion that the Hindus have borrowed the deity *Sitalā* from the Buddhistic *Hārīti*.

Hārīti in Buddhistic literature and also in *Purāṇa* is described as *Yakṣini* and also wife of *Kuber*, the god of wealth. Some believe that the name *Sitalā* (*Sital*—Soothing) has been

derived from the euphemism of the high inflammatory character of Small Pox attack.

The original form of *Sitalā* has been described as a “figurine bedaubed with vermilion without any arms and feet and having a face decorated with pimples¹²” and this original conception of *Sitalā* does not tally with that of the Orāons of the Sunderban area. They are accustomed in visualising *Sitalā* as the goddess sitting on an ass, like the local Hindus.

The different Hindu castes of estuarine Bengal worship the Goddess *Sitalā* regularly, and especially during outbreaks of Small Pox.

But this deity is not known to the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur.

(C) MANASĀ

The Orāons of this flood-ridden tract of Bengal consider *Manasā* as the presiding deity over the snakes, and this is also borrowed by them from the local Hindus. Nothing has been mentioned about *Manasā* in the original Orāon pantheon.

In the month of *Bhādra* (August-September), during the rains, *Manasā* is worshipped by the Orāons, as is done by the other local Hindus for their protection from snake bites. Throughout the year these people and their domesticated animals move about in fields, ditches, jungles etc., and during their movement, there is every possibility of snake-bite, as snakes are found in abundance in these flood ridden areas of Bengal. *Manasā* saves the people and their domestic animals from snake-bites. The effigy of the goddess *Manasā*, which is generally made in this area, is of a woman standing on a lotus having two snakes on two sides.

The Hindu castes of Sunderban also worship *Manasā*, the goddess of snakes regularly during rainy seasons when the frequency of deaths due to snake-bites increases. In Bengal a kind of cactus (*Snuhi* in Sanskrit) is considered to be the abode of *Manasā*, and it is worshipped accordingly. In Sunderban, this plant is known as *Mānasā-gāch* or *Sij-Manasā gāch* (*Cactus Indianis*). Besides this tree worship, the next form of *Manasā Pujā* is the worship of *Manasā* engraved on a stone. The earthen effigy of *Manasā* worshipped by the local Hindu

castes, is quite similar to that of the Orāons. Sometimes another effigy is found in this area, in which seven snakes expand their hoods on the head of the goddess like an umbrella, and the goddess remains seated on a lotus. Regarding the origin of the Goddess *Manasā Debi* in Bengal, some⁴³ are of opinion that, among the East-Indian Mahayana Buddhists, there is a goddess known as *Jānguli*, who is akin to the daughter of *Kirāta* (Fowler sect of *Mahādeva*) as described in *Atharva Veda*, and turned to *Manasā Devi* in Bengal at the time of abolition of Buddhism.

In a few villages of Ranchi district, Goddess *Manasā* is worshipped by the Orāons, but the conception regarding this goddess is not so clear among them as that of the Orāons of the Sunderban area. Further, the Sunderban Orāons worship *Manasā* in individual household level, and the head of the household performs the *pujā*, whereas in Ranchi in the few Orāon villages, where the *Manasā Pujā* is prevalent, she is generally worshipped at the community level by the *Nāg Māti* (a specialist) and his disciples, after observing fast for one day, and a sacrificed fowl is offered to her.

(D) MAHADEVA OR SIVA

Mahādeva is regarded by the Orāons of this area of Sunderban as one of the most important deities, which has been borrowed from the Hindus. In each *Thān* or altar, he is represented by a large earthen cone. During *Grām Pujā* or *Grām-Bāndhā* festival, he is worshipped with various type of narcotics such as hemp etc. He is also known as *Sir Gosāi* or *Sib Gosāi*. Excepting a few, most of the Orāons of this area do not worship *Sivā* or *Mahādevā* separately, but almost all the Orāons of this tract have a great reverence for this Hindu deity. Only a few Orāons of Sunderban, who are thoroughly Hinduised, worship this deity during *Chadāk* festival in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April). But among them, the conception of *Saivism* and the *Siva-Linga* has not been fully developed. *Saivism* could not develop to a fulfilled extent among the Bengalee Hindus due to the increased sway of *Vaisnavism*

and *Sāktaism* in Bengal, and hence *Saivism* lost its influence over the Hindus from a very early time, and could not influence the advanced Bengalee society. This may be the reason, why the Orāons of Sunderban could not develop a clear cut conception of *Saivism* though they came in close contact with the Hindu castes of this area.

The *Mahādeo* of the Orāon *Bhagats* of Chotā-Nāgpur perhaps derived its name from the Hindu deity *Mahādeva*. In this connection Roy says, "This deity, as its name signifies, has been borrowed from the Hindus" (1928 : 54). It is a tutelary deity of the class of spirit-doctors known as *Bhagats*. In a few villages, where the *Bhagats* are found in good numbers, *Mahādeo manda* or *Mahādeo-āsthān* (seat of *Mahādeo*) is present. This deity is represented by a roundish stone with a *trisul* (three-pronged spear) by its side. The worship of *Mahādeo* takes place in the month of *Srāban* (July-Aug), with a sacrifice of a goat. Sometimes, a childless woman pours milk on this stone, and makes a vow of certain sacrifices to be offered on the fulfilment of her desire for having a child.

Among the Hindu inhabitants of Sunderban, *Siva* or *Mahādeva* is worshipped at different times during a year. Sometimes the Hindu unmarried girls worship this deity for having a husband like Him or a childless woman propitiates Him with a desire for having a child. But though the Orāons of Sunderban worship this deity, the conception of stones in phallic shape (*Siva-Linga*) to represent a procreative force of nature or rather the power or deity who blesses human beings with offspring is not marked.

(E) CHANDI

Chandi is another tutelary deity of the Orāons of Sunderban, who is worshipped during *Grām Pujā*, and considered as the daughter of *Lord Hari* (one of the supreme divinities in Hindu Pantheon) which may be deduced from the following incantation uttered by the Orāon priest during *Grām-bāndhā* festival.

Om Sankar, Mahādev,
Iswar, Gouri, Pārbati,

Raksākālī Bhog Basāle.
 Kamukhyā *Harijhi Chandi*,
 Brahmmer jhi Sitalā,
 Laksmi, Saraswātī, Gangā Devi,
 Bhog Basāle”.

The words in italics i.e. *Harijhi Chandi* means *Chandi*, the daughter of Lord *Hari*. But Bhattacharya⁴⁴ thinks that *Hārījhi* (not *Harijhi*) means the daughter of some person, belonging to a low caste, *Hāri*, of Bengal who, after gaining some mystic power, was considered as Goddess *Chandi*. Like the other Hindus, the Orāons also believe that the *Chandi* though a tutelary deity, is very dreadful and malignant. She is worshipped along with the other deities during *Grām Pujā*. Among them, *Chandi* is known by different names such as *Mangal Chandi*, *Olāi Chandi*, *Uddhār Chandi* etc. Though all these deities possess the name *Chandi* in common, they have different forms and different function.

Chandi is also worshipped as a deity by different tribal people of Bengal, Bihar and some other regions of India. According to Hindu mythology, this deity is a Pre-Aryan one and the word *Chandi* is originally an Austric or Dravidian one. Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur there is a deity, considered as the goddess of hunting, who is named as *Chandi*. But the *Chandi* that is worshipped by the Orāons of Sunderban, may be considered as a deity borrowed from the local Hindus at a later phase, and not the ancient relic of the Orāon hunting deity *Chāndi*, as in the tract of Deltaic Bengal, *Chandi* is not considered as deity of hunting. Further, it may be that these immigrant Orāons used to worship this deity as a hunting one at the initial stage of their migration, but along with the abandoning of hunting in this area and due to contact with the neighbouring Hindus for a long time, the original hunting deity (the *Chāndi*) has gradually changed into a Hindu tutelary deity, *Chandi*.

In one of the stories of *Chandi Mangala Kāvya*⁴⁵, the hero is a non-Aryan young fowler, and the description of *Chandi* as the deity of hunters and fowlers, is somewhat akin to the *Chāndi* of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, who is also

regarded as the deity of hunting. The *Chandi Mangala Kāvya* also clearly says that this deity is the presiding deity of the beasts, and the hunters and fowlers are always graced by her. In order to achieve success in hunting, she is worshipped by them.

Among the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur, this female deity is the deity *par excellence* of the unmarried young Orāons and she is represented by a roundish stone. "In an Orāon village there may be, and generally are, more than one seat (*āsthān*), on some upland or hill-slope for *Chāndi*, and at each of these places she is represented by a stone" (Roy : 1928 : 60). She is propitiated for a successful village hunting expedition, and also, in war in ancient times. On the full-moon day of *Māgh* (January-February), the great annual sacrifice is made to her by the bachelors as she is considered to be the goddess of the bachelors, and only the bachelors can offer sacrifices to her. During the *pujā* "one of the young bachelors, who owing to his supposed susceptibility to supernatural influences generally acts as the *pāi cha'owā* (mover of the divining instrument) on such occasions, has his eyes blind-folded". (Roy : 1928 : 61). This person by performing a divination selects the *Chāndi Pāhān* from the bachelors who acts as the priest in this *pujā*. This *pujā* is done for the success in the next hunting.

Besides this *Chāndi*, they also have an idea of another *Chāndi* known as *Mutri Chāndi*, who is represented by a stone under a tree and worshipped during *Sārhu* festival as a goddess imparting virility for procreation. The nature of worship of this *pujā* is quite different from that of the previous one.

The local Hindus of Sunderban also consider *Chandi* as a very dreadful and malignant deity. Among them, *Chandi* is propitiated in different names such as *Mangal*, *Chandi*, *Uran Chandi*, *Subha Chandi*, *Rām Chandi*, *Olāi Chandi*, *Ghor Chandi*, *Uddhār Chandi* etc. Again many of them have different forms such as *Mangal Chandi* has *Nitya Mangal Chandi*, *Jai Mangal Chandi*, *Sankat Mangal Chandi* etc. The origin, forms, functions etc. of all these types of *Chandi* differ from each other.

(F) LAKSMI AND TUSU THAKUR

Like other Hindu castes of Sunderban the Orāons of this tract also consider *Laksmi* as the goddess of wealth, and like them, a few Orāons also worship *Laksmi* on the full moon day of the month of *Āswīn* (September-October). The Orāons of some of the villages in general, worship the Goddess *Laksmi* during *Grām Pujā* for the prosperity of the community as a whole. There is no doubt that this deity of the Hindus has been borrowed by these Orāons as their tradition does not relate to any such deity. During *Tusu* festival, which is a class festival of the Orāon females, *Tusu Thakur* is worshipped, and this *Tusu Thakur* is considered by them as another form of *Laksmi*. The images they prepare for the worship of *Laksmi* and *Tusu* are quite similar to each other in appearance etc.

The conception of the Orāons regarding this deity is that she is a female deity, and sits on a lotus, holding a bunch of paddy plants and a basket of wealth, having an owl as her *vāhana* by her side.

The worship of *Laksmi* or *Tusu* among the Orāons of Ranchi is also not a very popular phenomenon.

(G) SARASWATI

Saraswati is considered by the Orāons as the goddess of learning like the local Hindus. The different Hindu inhabitants of Sunderban worship *Saraswati* as goddess of learning, and this has been borrowed by the Sunderban Orāons. This goddess of learning of the Hindus is propitiated by a few well-to-do Orāons, particularly by those who have school-going children. They worship this deity on that day of the month of *Māgh* (January-February) when the local Hindus also worship *Saraswati*. Their conception of the form of this deity is also quite similar to that of the Hindus i.e. the goddess sitting on a lotus or a swan with *vinā* (harp) in her hand.

The worship of *Saraswati* is generally not done by the Ranchi Orāons.

(H) SASTHI

Some Orāons of Deltaic Bengal worship *Sasthi* after child

birth or during name-giving ceremony as she is considered as giver and protector of children, as is done by the local Hindus. The idea regarding *Sas̥thi* and her worship has been borrowed by these people from the local Hindus.

In the earlier Sanskrit *Purāṇas*, the name of this deity cannot be found, but this has been mentioned in the later *Purāṇas* such as *Devi-Bhagavata* and *Brahmma Vaivarta Purāṇa* etc. The *Devi-Bhagavata* describes *Sas̥thi* as an epithet of *Durgā* in the form of *Kāṭyayāni*, but still it may be said that like *Manasā* or *Chandi*, *Sas̥thi* is also a popular local deity. Like *Sas̥thi*, the Buddhist Tantric goddess *Hārīti* is also connected with the new-born babies; but the difference is that *Hārīti* is the stealer and killer of children, and is worshipped in order to save the children, but *Sas̥thi* is worshipped as the giver and protector of the children.

Like the local Hindus, the Sunderban Orāons also consider *Sas̥thi* as the household deity. The Orāons do not worship any image of *Sas̥thi*, on the other hand she is believed to be present in a *Thān* built in the courtyard or one corner of a room of individual household. The local Hindus generally worship one of the forms of this deity (*Janma Sas̥thi*) on the sixth day after child-birth, and some believe that the deity has derived her name from this day ("Sixth" in Sanskrit is '*Sas̥tha*', where-from the name *Sas̥thi* comes). In a few Hindu villages, in a common *Sas̥thitala* (abode of *Sas̥thi*) is found, but not in any of the Orāon villages of Sunderban.

In connection with the name of *Sas̥thi*, Crooke⁴⁶ says that the word *Sas̥thi* means *Sixth Mother*. Among the Hindus different types of *Sas̥thi* are recognised such as *Dhulo Sas̥thi*, *Durgā Sas̥thi*, *Lotan Sas̥thi*, *Pātāi Sas̥thi*, *Aranya Sas̥thi*, *Sitāl Sas̥thi* etc. The Orāons have no detailed conception of all these types of *Sas̥thi* as that of the local Hindus. The *Aranya Sas̥thi* is popularly known among the Hindus and also among the Orāons as *Jāmāi Sas̥thi* (son-in-law's day).

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur have no corresponding deity of this type.

(I) DURGA

Though a few Orāons recognise *Durgā* as their deity, in

general they do not worship *Durgā*. At present, during *Durgā Puja* performed by the Hindus in the month of *Āswin* the Orāons subscribe for the *puja* and also attend it, but they do not take active part. They have almost similar types of conception regarding the form of *Durgā* as that of the Hindus, though they do not know the detailed mythological legend connected with the Goddess *Durgā*. A few of them are also familiar with the other names of *Durgā* (such as *Pārbati*, *Gouri* etc) as the Hindus.

This deity is also not quite familiar to the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur.

(J) BHUT

These are evil spirits generally regarded as residing in unclean places or on some trees which are considered to be inauspicious places. Sometimes, they are believed to assume human forms wearing white clothes, and sometimes they appear as a moving skeleton. When a person happens to pass by the residing places, they are liable to be possessed by these spirits. In Hindu popular mythological stories, *Bhuts* have been described as camp followers of *Mahādeva* and this idea is not prevalent among the general Orāon mass excepting a few thoroughly Hinduised ones.

(K) PETNI (PRETINI)

It is a female evil spirit, generally haunting in almost identical places as those of the *Bhuts*. It always seeks to do harm to the people. When a person is possessed by a *Petni*, the *Ojhā* or *Gunin* is called in to gouge it out. It is believed to assume the form of a woman wearing a red-boarder'd white *sāri*, which can vanish within a moment and can take any shape it likes, like the *Bhuts*.

(L) DAKINI AND JOGINI

Like the local Hindus, the Orāons also consider these evil spirits, *Dākini* and *Jogini* as followers of the Goddess

Kālī. These are terrible in appearance and are believed to relish flesh and blood of human beings.

It is quite clear from the foregoing discussions that the Orāons of South Bengal have imbibed a good many of deities, and the beliefs and practices associated with them from the local Hindus of the area. Some of these deities have fully been adjusted with their own belief and culture, and some are still in the process of naturalization. As these deities are much more popular among the Bengalee Hindus as compared to the Ranchi Hindus, the Sunderban Orāons have imbibed ideas about these deities much more than the Ranchi Orāons.

III. DEITIES PECULIAR TO SUNDERBAN BORROWED BY THE IMMIGRANT ORĀONS.

In the foregoing pages detailed discussion has been made about the deities etc. that belong traditionally to the Orāons and those that have been borrowed by the Orāons of the Sunderban area from the local Hindus which are generally accepted as Hindu deities.

It is now intended to discuss about a few deities etc. that are peculiar to the Sunderban area, and have been imbibed by the immigrant Orāons. Of these deities, *Daksin Roy*, *Kālū Roy* and *Banbibī* are the most prominent. Some of these deities (e.g. *Daksin Roy*, *Banbibī* etc.) are at present worshipped also in the areas adjacent to Sunderban, but it may be stated here that a few centuries back a large portion of these adjoining areas were also covered with dense forests, and in all probability formed parts of Sunderban forest tracts in those days. In those days, these cults of Sunderban might have infiltrated into these adjoining areas.

(A) DAKSIN ROY

In lower Bengal (Deltaic Bengal), *Daksin Roy* is recognised as the presiding deity over tigers. As he is the presiding deity in the southern part of Bengal, he is known as *Daksin Roy* or *Daksin Rāj* (*Daksin*—South). In the southern

part of Bengal, the famous Sunderban forest is situated, which was infested with well known Royal Bengal tigers, and the presiding deity of these tigers of this forest is known as *Daksin Roy*. According to some scholars⁴⁷ *Daksin Roy* was a famous hunter who hunted numerous tigers and crocodiles and gradually he was turned into a legendary deity. It is also said by some⁴⁸ that *Daksin Roy* was the chief general (*Senāpati*) of the King *Mukut Roy* of Brahman-nagar in Jessore, who afterwards appointed *Daksin Roy* as the administrator of the lower Bengal and the latter got the title of *Bhāṭeswar* or *Āṭhāro Bhāṭir Mā'ik* (Owner or Administrator of eighteen parganas). *Daksin Roy* is a typical Sunderban deity, and there is no mention of it in the ancient Indian mythologies.

In Sunderban, *Daksin Roy* is revered by both the Hindus and the Muslims. Kavi Krisna Ram⁴⁹ (Hindu) in his *Roy Mangal Kāvya* (1686) and Munsī Bayanuddin Saheb⁵⁰ (Muslim) in his *Banbibir Jahurānāmā* (1877) gave almost identical descriptions about *Daksin Roy*, *Bara Khān Gāji* and *Banbibī*. The said authors have also mentioned in their books that in those days both the Hindus and the Muslims of this area considered *Daksin Roy* as a deity along with other deities such as *Banbibī*, *Kā'u Roy*, *Bara Khān Gāji* etc., and this still persists among these two religious groups of this region.

In the past, people of lower Bengal were always in fear of tigers, and this fear led to the development of this deity (*Daksin Roy*) amongst these people in order to get over the menace from tigers; and centering round the deity of the region the *Roy Mangal Kāvya* was written. Ajoy Kumar Roy⁵¹ in his *Sonā Royer Geet* (1947) says that *Sonā Roy* is the presiding deity of the tigers of North Bengal. But it is not yet clear whether there is any genealogical link between *Sonā Roy* of North Bengal and *Daksin Roy* of Southern Bengal.

The effigy (which these people of the Sunderban area prepare) of *Daksin Roy* is a handsome male figure sitting on a tiger, holding a bow and arrow in his hand. It is often seen in Sunderban that, when the people go to the forest to fell trees or to collect honey or for other purposes, they worship

Daksin Roy along with *Kālu Roy* and *Banbibi* for protection.

When the immigrant Orāons came to this area as labourers to reclaim this forest-ridden tract, many of them lost their lives from attacks of tigers, and with the gradual contact with the Hindus, they imbibed the idea of revering this deity, and gradually started worshipping him like the local inhabitants for the protection of their lives from the tigers of the forests. At present, though vast tracts have been cleared of forests and the number of tigers in the area also has fallen considerably, still the Orāons as also the other local inhabitants continue to worship *Daksin Roy* at least in their village festivals.

(B) KALU ROY

In Sunderban area, people of all the communities both tribal as well as non-tribal worship *Kālu Roy*. *Kālu Roy* is regarded by these people as the presiding deity of the crocodiles that infest the numerous creeks and rivers of the Sunderban area. In *Roy Mangal Kāvya*⁵² and also in some other books⁵³ he has been described as the deity of the crocodiles, but Bhattacharya⁵⁴ considers it to be another presiding deity of the tigers like *Daksin Roy*. *Kālu Roy* is worshipped in many of the Orāon villages of this area annually during *Grām pujā*.

(C) BANBIBI OR BANKALI

Banbibi is another typical deity of Sunderban, and is regarded as the presiding deity of the Sunderban forests. Previously, both the Hindus and the Muslims, before starting for the forest for cutting trees or for collecting different articles such as honey etc., used to worship *Banbibi* i.e. 'the Lady of the Forest'. Afterwards the local Hindus changed the Muslim surname of this deity and made it a Hindu one by giving the name *Bankālī*. In *Banbibir Jahurānāmā* (1877) Munsī Bayanuddīn⁵⁵ has shown the supremacy of *Banbibi* over *Daksin Roy*. Sometimes, as stated by Ghose,⁵⁶ *Banbibi* is considered as *Devi Bishālākshi*, who is also known as the ruling deity of the

fisherman and also honey-collectors of the Sunderban area. This *Bishālākshi* is also known as *Bāsuli devi*. In different villages of Southern Bengal, this *Bishālākshi* is represented by a figurine, sitting on the back of the tiger, and accordingly, like *Daksin Roy*, she is, sometimes, also known as the goddess of the tigers. In many Hindu and Muslim households of Sunderban, there are *Thāns*, specially meant for *Banbibī*, where she is worshipped regularly. The Orāons were brought over to this area for reclamation of the land, and as that involved many dangers, they imbibed the idea of this forest deity from the neighbouring castes and communities around them for protection and safe return from the forests.

None of these typical Sunderban deities is known to the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons as these did not develop in that region.

IV. OTHER LESS IMPORTANT DEITIES, SPIRITS ETC.

The Orāons of Sunderban worship some other deities, spirits etc. also which do not play very significant role in their socio-religious life, and may be grouped as less important deities, spirits etc. These are worshipped in Orāon households and that too not regularly. This category of less important deities etc. include some traditional Orāon deities and spirits as also a few Hindu deities in general, and some typical ones developed in Sunderban.

(A) DANGRI

This is a household deity, generally worshipped once in a few years by a few Orāon families. This is generally worshipped by the *Pāhān* by sacrificing a black he-goat.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur this household spirit is known as *Dāngrā-Nād* and also as *Bārndā Pāchcho* or the *Old Lady Bārndā*, who is believed to be the guardian spirit of each household. The *Dāngrā Nād* is obviously so named with reference to the fact that this spirit requires a periodical sacrifice of a bullock (*dāngrā*)....." (Roy : 1928 : 72). This spirit is believed by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur to be watching

over the thrashing ground after harvest when paddy stocks are kept in heaps on it, and thus this spirit is also named as *Uddu Bārndā* or *Keter Bārndā*. This spirit, sometimes appears in dreams in the form of an old woman.

(B) PAHAR

This spirit *Pāhār* is considered by the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal as the spirit of the hill of their ancestral homeland. It is worshipped on community level in some of the Orāon villages after every twelve years. The *Pāhān* or *Ojhā* acts as the priest of the *pujā* and a sacrificed goat is offered to the spirit.

In the Chotā-Nāgpur area, the spirit *Bar Pāhāri* is considered to be the spirit of the hill, which was originally considered to be in the original home or cradle land of the family or rather the sib (clan). *Bar Pāhāri* is also known as *Bārndā*, and this spirit in all probability was borrowed from the Mundās of Chotā-Nāgpur.

(C) ADHARIA

Ādhāriā is regarded as the spirit of darkness by the Orāons of Southern Bengal. It, generally, lives and haunts in dark places, and is worshipped by the *Pāhān* by sacrificing a black goat on a particular new-moon day in the month of *Kārtick* (Oct.-Nov.)

(D) YAKSINI

This female spirit *Yaksini* has been borrowed by the Orāons of the Sunderban area from the local Hindus. But the Hindu conception of *Yaksini* being the wife of *Yaksa* or *Kuber*, the god of wealth, has not yet developed among these Orāons. They only consider *Yaksini* to be an evil spirit.

No prototype of this is existent among the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons.

(E) NARAYANA OR VISHNU

This is regarded by the Hindus as one of three Supreme Deities and has been borrowed by a few thoroughly Hinduised

Orāons who worship Him, generally, employing a *Brāhmin* priest. The deity is worshipped by following the Hindu method in the full-moon day of the month of *Māgh* (Jan.-Feb.). The conception of Supremacy of this deity as present among the local Hindus has not yet so fully developed among these Orāons. *Hari* is also another name of *Nārāyan*. During *Sādhuāli*, the *Sādhus* narrate the glory of the Hindu deities including *Nārāyan* or *Hari* also.

(F) DANO

It is believed to be a terrible demon having an appearance like a human being with large teeth and frightful eyes. It is believed to be always seeking to do harm to the people.

(G) BADAR SAHEB

Badar Sāheb is considered by the local people of Sunderban, specially by the Muslims, as the *Pir* or Saint of the river. The lower portion of the district of 24-Parganas, rather the district of 24-Parganas, as a whole, is full of rivers, and in order to avoid goat disasters during storms etc., these people seek the help of *Badar Sāheb* by uttering *Badar*, *Badar* before starting their boats on the rivers. They believe that, if they utter the name of *Badar Sāheb*, the river-journey would be safe and free from dangers. The Orāons have borrowed the conception of *Badar Sāheb*, from the local people.

Ranchi Orāons have no such conception as the local environment of the area did not call for the same.

(H) BARA KHAN GAJI

Bara Khān Gāji is considered by the local people as one of the presiding deities of Sunderban. He is also regarded as the *Pir* or Saint. Both in *Roy Mangal Kāvya* and in *Banbibir Jahurānāmā*, the heroism of *Bara Khān Gāji* has been described. These two books have discussed about the fight between *Bara Khān Gāji* and *Daksin Roy*, and the former establishing

his supremacy over the Sunderban area. Both of them were afterwards brought into a compromise level by *Banbibi* or *Bankālī*, the goddess of the forest of Sunderban.

(I) KARAM RAJA

In Sunderban area among the Orāons, the popular belief is that *Dharma* or *Dharam Rājā* (Supreme Deity) is the elder brother of *Karna* or *Karam Rājā*. *Karam Rājā* is represented by a branch of *Karam* tree (*Nauclea parvifolia*), and is propitiated during *Karam Pujā* in the month of *Āswīn* (Sep.-Oct.). when the Hindus celebrate *Durgā Pujā*.

In Chotā-Nāgpur also "When the three *Karam* branches are brought in procession to the village *ākhrā*, they are ceremonially planted in the middle of the *ākhrā* or rather installed as *Karam Rājā* or *King Karam*, as he is addressed in songs sung on the occasion" (Roy : 1928 : 243).

But the conception of *Dharma* i.e. the Supreme Deity being the brother of *Karam Rājā* has not yet developed there.

(J) EVIL EYE (NAJAR)

The Orāons of Sunderban believe that some persons are born with evil potency or evil power or evil sight in their eyes, and whenever these people look at other people or at their children, food, drink, cattle, crops etc., these are believed to be affected, and harm is sure to fall on them. He is regarded as a person always jealous of others' prosperity and happiness. It is believed that if his *evil eye* falls on a healthy baby or a pregnant woman, or a milch cow or bumper crops, destruction and harm are sure to befall them. When someone's *evil eye* falls on any edible object or food-stuff, it is sure to turn poisonous. The village medicine-man or the magician only can detect it, and can neutralise it by means of his magical rites. In the same way, the Orāons of Sunderban are also afraid of evil touch (*Chhuā*), evil mouth, evil sound etc.

Similar types of conception regarding the evil eye, evil

touch etc. are present among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur as also among the backward castes of the Sunderban area.

The deities, spirits, supernatural powers etc. which have been described above, are responsible for the formation of a polytheistic religious structure of the present day Orāons of Sunderban, and this polytheistic structure is based on the amalgamation of beliefs and practices of their traditional way of thinking as well as those of the people around them. In spite of this, the method of worship by the Orāons of the deities borrowed from the local Hindus has not yet been fully Hinduised, but is rather a mixture of Hindu rites intermixed with their traditional animistic rites to a certain extent. It is expected that in course of time the traditional animistic features would gradually fade away. These Orāons are getting more and more accustomed to the use of *Gangājal* (sacred water of the holy Ganges), *Tulsijal* (water sanctified with Basil leaves), *Dhān-Durbā* (paddy and green grass), *Belpātā* (leaves of wood apple) etc. in different worships as done by the local Hindus.

D. FESTIVALS

The life and activities of the Orāons of Sunderban are impregnated with troubles and miseries which come from different sources e.g.—diseases, accidental death from snake bites etc. and from natural calamities like flood, cyclone etc., which cause damage and/or destruction of crops, domestic animals, houses and persons etc. But still they have to survive, they have to struggle with many odds and dangers of life, and in their monotonous day-to-day life, they need something to give them enthusiasm and freshness, which they secure by participating in different social functions and festivities of their community.

In almost, every season of the year the Orāons of this tract manage to make time for performing some festivities or others which serve to break the monotony of their life and rejuvenate them.

Of these festivals, the majority are household types while a few are village or community festivals, and of these festivals

(both household and community), some are observed regularly while the others occasionally. Further, out of the household festivals observed regularly, some are performed by a large number of families while some only by a few families. In most of the household festivals, the seniormost male member of the family acts as the priest, whereas in community festivals the *Pāhān* or *Ojhā* acts as the priest and, in a few cases Hindu Brahmin is employed for this purpose.

In Sunderban, most of the feasts and rituals of the household festivals recur annually, and are performed at a particular time of the year; these, along with the community festivals, form the mile-stones of the ritual cycle.

Another characteristic feature in the ritual cycle of the Sunderban Orāons is the presence of both traditional as well as borrowed festivities side by side. During their migration to this region, the Orāons brought over some of their traditional religious feasts and festivities from their original homeland; but with the march of time they have abandoned some of their traditional festivities and adopted some new ones from the surrounding castes and communities.

Among the present-day Orāons of this region of Sunderban, the old and the new festivities are inter-woven and similar types of emotional reactions accompany during the worship of various deities and others, whatever be their origin.

Of the traditional Orāon festivities, at present, only a few are observed by the Sunderban Orāons. Some of the most important among these are *Karam*, *Nawā-Khāni*, *Soharāi* and *Sārhu*. Most of the other festivals are connected with the worship of Hindu deities, as *Sitala Pujā*, *Manasā Pujā*, *Kālī Pujā*, *Laksmi Pujā* etc.

The Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur also have a number of feasts and festivities. These feasts and festivities, mostly observed communitywise, are grouped by Roy into the following categories :—

(A) FOOD-GATHERING FESTIVALS

Though the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur are purely agriculturists at present, still they supplement the produce of their

field by gathering edible flowers, leaves, roots and tubers etc. "And there appear to be good reasons to think that the principal religious festival of the tribe, the *Khāddi* or *Sarhūl*, was in origin a festival of the food gathering stage of the economic history of the tribe" (Roy: 1928: 191). At present, the simple rites of this original festival of the food-gathering stage, have been overburdened with the other rites of the advanced economic life. Besides *Khāddi* or *Sārhuḷ* festival, *Phāgu* is also considered to be another festival connected with food gathering.

(B) HUNTING FESTIVALS

In the present-day life of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, hunting, as an occupation, has been supplanted by agriculture, and the Orāons, at present, do not boast of their ancient fame for hunting, and also do not depend on that. Still, they observe (though irregularly) three important hunting festivals. These are:—

- (a) the *Phāgu Sendrā* or Spring Hunt undertaken in the month of *Phāgun* (March).
- (b) the *Bisu Sendrā* or Summer Hunt undertaken in *Baisākh* (April-May).
- (c) *Jeth Sendrā* or Rainy season's Hunt undertaken in the month of *Jeth* (June).

(C) FESTIVALS CONNECTED WITH THE CATTLE

The Orāons observe a festival connected with the cattle known as *Soharāi*.

(D) AGRICULTURAL FESTIVALS

From their gathering and hunting stages of economy, when they turned to agriculture, the Orāons adopted a number of festivities connected with agriculture. Of these festivities, *Hariāri* is the principal annual agricultural festival which is celebrated in the month of *Āsār* (June-July), when the paddy—seedlings just start germinating and sprout new shoots. The other agricultural festivals are as follows—*Kādloṭā* observed in the month of *Bhādra* (August); *Khārihāni* or *Khārrā Pujā* in

the month of *Kārtick* or *Agrahayan* (Oct.-Nov.); *Karam* on the day after *Kādloṭā* and *Jitia*, twelve days after the *Karam* festival.

Besides all these important agricultural festivities, the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur have also a few other minor festivities connected with agriculture. These are as follows :—

- (a) The *Dhān buni puṣā* or Sowing festival, observed during sowing season.
- (b) The *Bāngri* ceremony or the marriage of paddy seedling during transplantation.
- (c) the *Nawā-khāni* festival or eating the new (upland or early) rice, during harvesting.

Thus, from the above, one can see that most of the festivities of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur are observed community-wise and are connected with economic activities. Besides these, they have a few household festivities which are probably newly acquired. The festivals of the present-day Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, in general, have undergone a good deal of changes and modifications due to varied factors. They, at present, do not observe all the above-mentioned festivities in detail, and the pomp and grandeur of the same have also been greatly reduced. Moreover, due to the intrusion of Christianity and Hinduism or rather *Bhagatism*, many of the apostates have almost given up their traditional festivals, and adopted the new festivities connected with their faiths. The Christian Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur observe *Pāskā* or *Easter Sunday*, *Sorg-Rohan* or *Christmas*, *New Year's Day* etc.

In Sunderban, the first two categories of original Orāon festivals as stated above i.e. food gathering and hunting festivals, are absent. The festivals, connected with cattle, on the contrary, are present and known as *Goreyā Puṣā* and *Soharāi*. Here *Kālī Puṣā* is also performed for the welfare of the buffaloes. The festivities connected with agriculture are *Nawā-Khāni*, *Laksmi Puṣā* etc.

Besides the festivities connected with economic activities, these Orāons of Sunderban have also other festivities connected with the spirits, animals, diseases etc.

The most important characteristic that should be mentioned here is that a few traditional Orāon festivals, which are

observed at the community level in Ranchi area, are observed at household level only by the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal. Further, it may be said that a good many of the festivities of the present day Orāons of Sunderban have been borrowed from the local Hindus.

The festivities of the Sunderban Orāons may be grouped under two heads (i) festivals held on household level (ii) festivals performed on community level. There is, however, one particular festival (*Bheloā-phāri*) which stands alone and peculiar, as it is associated with almost all important socio-religious activities, and performed at individual as well as community levels.

BHELOĀ-PHĀRI

Bheloā-phāri ceremony is a very significant one in the Orāon society, and is generally celebrated in connection with different socio-religious activities such as birth, marriage, death, and also during different household and village festivities. Roy is of opinion that *Bheloā-phāri* (*Dandā-kāṭṭā*) ceremony is "the only ceremony in which *Dharmes* alone is invoked and in which sacrifice is offered to Him alone" (1928: 24). The sacrifice consists of an egg which is inserted in the forked end of a split branch of *Chirchita* (*Heliotropium indicum* in Sunderban area) or *Bheloā* (*Semicarpus anacardium*) twig (in Chotā-Nāgpur area), and is offered in the manner of imitative magic, along with prayers to *Dharmes* for "breaking the *evil-eye* and *evil mouth* of evil-minded persons, wizards, witches and malicious spirits, *even as the egg is broken*, so that no harm may occur to the Orāon's crops,—and health, plenty and prosperity may attend him and his family" (Roy: 1928: 24).

The Orāons of both Chotā-Nāgpur as well as of Sunderban believe that this ceremony of *Bheloā-phāri* (i.e. *Dandā-Kāṭṭā*) was prescribed by *Dharmes* (i.e. Supreme Deity) Himself, and the Orāon legend narrates that this was adopted by the Orāons when their crops were first injured by animals and other insects. "From the traditional Orāon legend of the origin of man and his institutions we learn that this

magical ceremony of *Dāṇḍā-Kāṭṭā* was the original method of the Orāon's approach to supernatural powers for security from evil" (Roy: 1928: 24).

Among the Orāons of both the places this ceremony of *Dandā-kāṭṭā* or *Bheloā-phāri* is still present and performed in connection with different socio-religious festivities, and in both the places, the rituals connected with it, have undergone some changes, still the fundamentals of this festival remain intact. A brief description of the *Bheloā-phāri* ceremony as practised by the Orāons of flood-ridden area of Sunderban is given below:—

In the Sunderban area among the Orāons, the *Gunin* or *Ojhā* or *Pāhān* acts as the priest in this *pujā*. In a few cases, where the head of the household knows the rites connected with this ceremony, he himself performs the *pujā*. But in Ranchi district, either a professional *Māṭi* (spirit doctor) or paternal grand father or sister's husband of the child (in case of child-birth) or some elderly male person who knows the rites of this ceremony, generally, performs the *pujā*.

Before the *pujā* starts, the worshipper collects the following articles for the *Bheloā-phāri* ceremony in the Sunderban area:—

1. One egg.
2. One branch of *Chichre* or *Chirchita* (*Heliotropium Indicum* which is a substitute for *Bheloā* in Sunderban).
3. One Sup (winnowing fan) containing some *āruā* rice.
4. Some quantity of powdered rice, powdered ashes or charcoal and powdered earth of the oven.
5. One lighted lamp.
6. Some quantity of rice-beer (*hāndiā*) in a brass-vessel.
7. A glass of water.

In Chotā-Nāgpur also, similar types of articles are generally required for the ceremony; but instead of a branch of *Chichre* (*Heliotropium Indicum*), a small *Bheloā* (*Semicarpus anacardium*) is generally taken.

The *Ojhā* (the priest) first of all makes a diagram with powdered *āruā* rice. The diagram is a quadrilateral having a cross in the centre from one angle to another. Each outer

side of the diagram consists of a semi-circle. The diagram is again marked with the powdered earth of the oven and lastly with the powdered ash or charcoal. On the central crossing, a handful of rice is kept, and on it the broader end of the egg is placed keeping the narrower end upward.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur the diagram drawn in this ceremony is somewhat different from that of the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal. Among the Ranchi Orāons, the diagram consists of two circles—one inner and the other outer and outside this outer circle five or seven semi-circles like the petals of a flower are drawn. In the centre of the inner circle, a handful of rice is kept on which the egg is placed. The diagram is drawn with the help of rice-flour, coal-dust and a little burnt clay and looks like a flower.

In both the areas “The three colours, red (of the burnt clay of the hearth), white (of the rice-flour), and black (of the coal-dust) are believed to represent the rainbow—the largest and most powerful bow in heaven or earth—and therefore most potent in warding off the evil eye and the evil attentions of malignant spirits” (Roy: 1928: 127).

The priest sits on the east of the diagram facing west. He first of all bows to the Supreme Deity (*Dharma*) as also to their native land by touching his forehead with the *sup* (winnowing fan). He keeps the *sup* on the ground and splits one end of the branch of *Chichre*.

From the split end of the branch, he takes three pairs (six in number) of pieces of branch and puts one of the pieces between the two split ends of the branch forming a triangle. He keeps this triangular end of the split branch of *Chichre* tree on the upper end of the egg keeping the other end of the branch on the west of the diagram. The remaining five pieces are mixed with rice in the *sup*. An earthen lamp is lighted and kept on the north of the diagram.

When all these paraphernalia are over, the *Ojhā* (priest) washes his hands with water and takes a few *āruā* rice from the *sup* and throws these with his right hand thrice, all the time uttering the name of *Dharma*, and that of their native land (i.e. Chotā-Nāgpur). Then he places the *sup* on his

lap and rubs the rice on the *sup* by his right hand uttering the following incantations:—

Oi Hari Lāge, Guru, Tohāri Lāge,
Guru, Guru, Anki Oi Hari Lāge.
Mātā, Piṭāke Oi Hari Lāge Guru.....
Purabe Dharmer Deotā, Gore Dhari Johār,
Nā Nā Lāge Dān, Pāye Lāge
Nā Nā Lāge Dān,
Uttare Dharmer Deotā,
Gore Dhari Johār,
Pāye Dhari Johār, Nā Nā Lāge Dān.
Paschime Dharmer Deotā, Nā Nā Lāge Dān,
Dakshine Barkā Thākur, Johāri, Nā Nā Lāge Dān.
Bisanā Path Dharmer Deotā, Gore Dhari,
Johāri Nā Nā Lāge Dān.

("I bow to my Master *Hari*

I bow to my *Parents*

I bow to the feet of *Dharma* on the East with various offerings.

I bow to the feet of *Dharma* on the North with various offerings.

I bow to the feet of *Dharma* on the West with various offerings.

I bow to the *Barkā Deotā* on the South with various offerings.

I bow to the feet of *Dharma*).

Then he takes a little *āruā* rice from the *sup* and drops them on the egg. This process is repeated thrice. Thereafter he starts rubbing the rice of the *sup* with his right hand in the name of *Sir Gosāin* (*Siva* or *Mahādeva*) uttering following incantations:—

Dohāi Bābā Sir Gonsāinā
Grāme Kāṭā Khowchā Nā Lāge,
Dohāi Bābā Sir Gonsāinā
("Oh, Sir Gonsāinā, save the
Village from harm and injury").

After this, he drops some *āruā* rice, a little *hāndiā* and lastly, ordinary water, each three times, one after another.

Afterwards, he performs a magical rite by which he understands whether the ceremony performed till now is right or not. This magical rite is described below :—

The *Ojhā* or the priest takes five pieces of *Chichre* sticks from the *sup* and throws these from his palm. If at least two pieces out of five fall in such a way that the exposed surfaces of the sticks are the inner or interior surfaces, than it is proved that the *pujā* is done successfully, otherwise the *Ojhā* has to repeat the whole procedure of the *pujā* again from the beginning. When the *Ojhā* finds that the *pujā* has been successfully done, he salutes the deities of the homeland (*Chotā Nāgpur*) thrice by bowing down and by joining the palms together. Thereafter, he breaks the narrower end of the egg and pours the contents of the egg within a pot, and keeps the empty shell of the egg filled with water in the same pot. Then he drinks *hāndiā* and gives the contents of the egg kept in the pot, to be baked by a member of the family (in case of household functions) or to a *Bhakat* or assistant of the priest (in case of community festivals).

Again, he starts rubbing the *āruā* rice on the *sup* uttering the previous *mantras* or incantations. When this is over, he places the shell of the egg upside down and breaks it on the rice on which the egg was kept.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, among the Orāons, "The man who officiates at the ceremony of 'cutting the (evil) teeth' sits in front of the diagram and recites in a sing-song tone a long story, the first part of which gives the traditional account of the origin and multiplication of mankind, and the institution of agriculture, and the second part commemorates the discovery of iron and gives the traditional origin of the gods and spirits" (Roy : 1928 : 127). Along with the recitations of all these, he goes on rubbing the *āruā* rice with his hand kept within the winnowing fan (*sup*). When this is finished, he takes up the egg in his left hand and sprinkles rice on it with his right hand with a prayer to *Dharmes*. While uttering this prayer, he breaks the egg with the stroke of the blade of a knife and pours the yolk into a leaf-cup containing rice-flour which is then placed on a hearth for baking.

In Sunderban, after breaking the shell of the egg, the officiator takes the bifurcated stick of *Chichre* (*Bheḷoā*) and inserts it in the roof of the house where the festival is going on, and in cases of village festival the stick is inserted within the roof of the house of the *Bhakat* or the assistant of the priest, and brings out the old stick of *Bheḷoā* from the roof together with a few stalks of straw and throws these outside the house or village boundary as the case may be.

Then he takes all the articles used in this *puja* on a banana leaf and cleans the place of the worship. Taking this banana leaf along with its contents in the right hand and a glass of water in the left hand, he goes to the village-boundary in the western direction (in case of household festival a little away from the boundary of the house). There he throws all the articles and utters the name of the village deity *Kāli* and prays to her not to allow any evil spirit, evil soul etc. to enter the village or the house (as the case may be) to do harm. Then he marks the ground thrice by index finger. Afterwards he washes his mouth and face with the water in the glass and returns to the *Thān* (in the house or in the village as the case may be).

On returning to the *Thān*, he sits on his seat facing south, and is given the baked egg, a little of which he offers first to *Dharma* and then to other deities thrice. He offers a little *hāndiā* or rice beer and a little water to the deities. Then he distributes portions of the baked egg as *Prasād* to the members of the house belonging to the same sib as that of the head of the family (in case of household festivities) or among the children of the village (in case of village festivals).

In Chotā Nāgpur, after the breaking of the egg, the officiator scraps out the coal-dust and red-earth of the oven from the ground and keeps these in the respective leaf-cup of coal dust and red earth of the oven. He throws these away at a road-side place. On returning, he washes his face, hands and feet, and makes obeisance to all present there.

As the baked egg is brought before him, he takes a little of it with his finger-nails and offers it to *Dharmes*. The rest of the baked egg is distributed to the children. Then he

offers as libation a little water to *Dharmes* and a little rice-beer to the ancestor-spirits.

In both the areas at the end of the ceremony the officiator and the guests are supplied with drinks.

This ceremony of the Orāons of Sunderban differs in many respects from that of the Orāons of Ranchi though the basic idea remains the same. The diagram, used in this ceremony in the Sunderban area, is different from that of Ranchi district, the method of worship is also quite different. The most distinctive feature that can be noticed in the Sunderban area, is that the worship of the deity in this festival is not only restricted to *Dharmes* or *Dharma* (Sun-God) alone as is done by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur; but here in the Sunderban area along with *Dharma* or the Supreme Deity, other deities such as *Sir Gosāin* (*Siva* or *Mahādeva*), *Kālī* and the deities of the homeland (Chotā Nāgpur) etc. are also invoked, though *Dharma* takes the first position. In Sunderban, the *Bheloā-phāri* or *Dandā-Kaṭṭā* ceremony is absent among other castes and communities around the Orāons.

A. HOUSE-HOLD FESTIVALS

The Orāons of the Sunderban area perform a number of household festivals, and in most of these cases, the ceremonies are performed by the male head of the family or an elderly male member of the household who knows how to worship the deities associated with these household festivities. In some household festivities, the village priest (*Pāhān*) officiates and in some cases the Hindu *Brahmins* or *Vaisnabs* are called in for the purpose.

Table XIV gives a list of household festivals of the Orāons of Sunderban.

Besides these, they have some other household festivals such as *Dāngri Pujā*, *Pāhār Pujā* etc. which are celebrated once after a few years' interval.

Brief descriptions of the Orāons household festivals also given below:—

TABLE XIV

Sl. No.	Name of the festival	Deity concerned	Bengali Month of festivity	English Calender
1.	<i>Asriā Puṇā</i>	<i>Gāon-deoti</i>	<i>Ashār</i>	June-July
2.	<i>Nawā Khāni</i>	<i>Burāburi</i>	<i>Vādro</i>	Aug-Sept.
3.	<i>Manasā Puṇā</i>	<i>Manasā</i>	<i>Vādro</i>	Aug-Sept.
4.	<i>Karam Puṇā</i>	<i>Karamrājā</i>	<i>Āswin</i>	Sept-Oct.
5.	<i>Laksmi Puṇā</i>	<i>Laksmi</i>	<i>Āswin</i>	Sept-Oct.
6.	<i>Kālī Puṇā</i>	<i>Kālī</i>	<i>Kārtik</i>	Oct-Nov.
7.	<i>Goreyā Puṇā</i> <i>Sohārai</i>	<i>Goreyā</i>	<i>Kārtik</i>	Oct-Nov.
8.	<i>Nārāyan Puṇā</i>	<i>Nārāyan</i>	<i>Māgh</i>	Jan-Feb.
9.	<i>Saraswati Puṇā</i>	<i>Saraswati</i>	<i>Māgh</i>	Jan-Feb.
10.	<i>Sitalā Puṇā</i>	<i>Sitalā</i>	<i>Fālgun</i>	Feb-March.
11.	<i>Surjāhī Puṇā</i>	<i>Dharma</i>	<i>Fālgun</i>	Feb-March.
12.	<i>Sārhu Puṇā</i>	<i>Dharma, Burāburi</i>	<i>Chaitra</i>	March-April

(1) ASRIA PUJA OR GAON DEOTI PUJA

Āsriā or *Gāon Deoti Puṇā*, which involves worshipping of *Gāon deoti* and the ancestors, takes place in the month of *Ashār* (June-July) in almost all the *Orāon* families. The day before the *puṇā*, the female folk of the household clean the house and the courtyard with cow-dung paste. A place, generally the western side of the main hut, is selected for the *puṇā*. Different articles are used in the *puṇā* of which *āruā* rice, rice-beer, *Tulsijāl*, vermilion, incense, incense-burner, lamp, fowls etc. are important.

Early in the morning of the *puṇā* day all the members of the family take bath. The worshipper (generally the senior-most male member of the family) observes fast, and wearing a new or clean *dhuti* and *chāddar*, kneels down before the altar facing west wards and sanctifies the articles of *puṇā* by sprinkling sacred *Tulsijāl* on them. He, then, keeps three handfuls of rice in three places in a row on that spot and stands up facing west and taking one of the fowls in his left hand and some *āruā* rice from one of the heaps, in the right hand, utters the names of the native village and ancestors. He, then, prays to them saying—

‘.....’¹ ‘.....’² Bālbāchchā Bhālā Rahabei,
 Kono Jānu Hāmneki Jānu Bipad Nā Hai.
 Hāmṛā Sukhe Rahabei,
 Sāl Purlei Hāmṛā Ār Debei Toke ;
 Deothi Khusi Karke, Tui Khā.
 Hamneke Jānu Kono Bipad Nā Ferbe.

“Oh deity of the village! Oh forefathers! keep the children of.....¹ of.....² in Chotā Nāgpur well. Let no danger touch them. Let them live in happiness and prosperity—We will again worship you on the expiry of this year. Take these and be satisfied. Please see that no danger can touch us”).

When the prayer is over, he kneels down and feeds the fowl with *āruā* rice from one of the heaps. As the fowl starts taking rice, he drops some *āruā* rice from right hand on the head of the fowl, and this process is repeated three times, after which he beheads the fowl and keeps a feather stained with blood from the head of the fowl on the heap of the rice.

When the sacrifice is over, he drops a little country liquor, known as *Rasimad* specially meant for the *pujā*, on the heaps of *āruā* rice. This process of dropping *Rasimad* on the heaps of rice is known as *Tapān* (perhaps *Tarpan* i.e. libation in Bengali).

After the end of *Tapān*, the sacrificed fowl or fowls are collected, and with the fowls and *āruā* rice used in the *pujā*, *Tahari* is prepared. The preparation of *Tahari* is given below :—

First of all the heads and the bodies of the sacrificed animals or birds are exposed to fire till the hairs or feather turn into ashes. Then these are cleaned, dressed and cut into small pieces. A vessel is placed on the hearth with some mustard oil in it, and when the oil becomes sufficiently heated,

¹ Generally the name of the original village (in Chotā Nāgpur) from where they migrated, is uttered.

² Generally the of sib (*gotro*) is uttered.

the pieces of meat are poured into the vessel along with some quantity of turmeric paste, red cardamom seeds and cinamon. When the meat is a bit fried, a quantity of *āruā* rice is poured into the vessel. Then the whole thing is stirred thoroughly so that the rice can mix with meat and spices. After this sufficient quantity of water is poured into the vessel and allowed to boil. When the contents are sufficiently boiled a little salt is added to it, and the vessel is unhearthed. Thus *Tahari* is prepared.

As soon as the *Tahari* is prepared, a little of it is taken on a leaf (of banana generally) or brass plate, and the officiator drops a little of it on each of the rick of rice once (as an offering to the deity). It should be done before any one takes the *Tahari*.

After *Tahari*, *Rasimad* is similarly offered to the deity. Lastly worshipper pours some cold water on each heap so as to symbolically wash the mouths of the ancestors and the deity concerned. He, then, drinks a cup of *Rasimad*. After the offering of *Tahari* and *Rasimad*, the following incantation is uttered during symbolic washing of the mouth : —

Bhagabān Unke Bhāt Khiāli.

Bhagabān Tor Nām Kore

Ai Mankar Mukhe Ekṭu Kāchā Pāni Dili,

(Oh God, I have given you food to eat. Now I am giving you water to wash your mouth).

When the *pujā* is over, all the members of the family belonging to the same sib take a little of the *Tahari* as *Prasād*. Those who belong to other sibs and who may be near relatives, are still not allowed to take the *Prasād*.

Thus the *Āsriā pujā* is over with the hope that the deity and the ancestors will save the family from deaths and diseases, and also help in preserving peace in the family.

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, there is no such *pujā* which is exclusively meant for *Gāon Deoti* and performed in the month of *Āshār* (June-July). But the Ranchi Orāons worship *Gāon Deoti* in association with different socio-religious festivities.

The ripening of the crop in the field and its harvesting bring a few enthusiasm among the Orāons impregnated with boundless rejoice. They burst into great delight, when the ripened crops heap up on the courtyard or fill the granaries.

In the month of *Bhādra* (August-September), the Orāons of Sunderban bring home new paddy (early paddy such as *Āus*, *Geiti* etc). With this new paddy, they celebrate *Nawā-khāni* festival or 'Eating of New Rice of the Field', when the new crops of the field are offered first of all to *Dharma* and *Burā-buri*. This festival reminds one of the *Nabānna* of the neighbouring Hindu castes observed in the month of *Agrāhayan* (November-December) or *Pous* (December-January).

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, the 'Eating of the New Rice Festival' (*Nawā Khani*) is observed when the first crops of the field are offered to *Sarnā Burhiā* or *Chatā Pāchcho*. This festival is celebrated in the month of *Bhādra* (August-September) during the harvest of the upland rice (*Gorādhān*).

Nawā Khāni festival of the Orāons of Southern Bengal is generally observed during morning hours. Before starting the *pujā*, the women folk of the household cleanse the house and courtyard with cow-dung paste. A portion of the courtyard or hut (which may be called as the *Thān* or altar for the *pujā*) is specially cleansed for the *pujā* purpose. The worshipper (generally the senior-most male member of the family) goes to the paddy field and brings a fresh bunch of paddy and keeps this on the *Thān*. The following articles are also required for the *pujā*—*Tulsijal*, *āruā* rice, rice-beer, some powdered rice, fowl, some ash and mud of the oven etc.

Just before the *pujā*, the worshipper purifies all these articles by sprinkling sanctified *Tu'sijal*. During the *pujā*, the worshipper first of all offers "new paddy" to *Dharma*, then to *Burāburi* (ancestral spirits). He keeps some *āruā* rice in several heaps in a row (the number of heaps varying according to the number of fowls to be sacrificed). Thereafter holding the fowl in his left hand and with some *āruā* rice in right hand, he stands up and utters the names of the ancestors.

Afterwards he sits down and feeds the fowl with *āruā* rice from the rick. As the fowl starts taking *āruā* rice, he drops a few *āruā* rice from his hand on the head of the fowl. Again he stands up and utters the names of the ancestors. The whole process is repeated three times after which, he sacrifices the fowl with a knife and offers it to the ancestors, keeping the head of the sacrificed fowl by the side of the heap of *āruā* rice and the body a little away from it. He also puts a feather of the fowl, stained with blood, on the heap.

Afterwards, with the body and the head of the sacrificed fowl and with *āruā* rice he prepares *Tahari* (in the same way as is done in *Āsriā Puja*). This *Tahari* is first offered to the ancestors and then distributed to others.

When all these parapharnelia are over, he performs *Bheloā-phāri* in the same way as described earlier. *Bheloā-phāri* may be observed in the same day or after a few days.

At the end of *Bheloā-phāri*, he takes the sanctified 'new-paddy' on a winnowing fan. This is kept apart for some portion of this paddy being mixed with the paddy of the grain-gola.

In Ranchi district, among the Orāons, the *Pāhān* (priest) along with his assistant, *Pujār*, goes to the *Gorā* paddy field on an appointed day, wherefrom he gathers some *gorā* paddy and returns home. The wife of the *Pāhān* or that of the *Pujār* prepares *chiurā* (chapped rice) with this paddy. The *Pāhān*, taking those *chiurā*, enters the room of his house, where the sacred winnowing basket (*sup*) of the *Sarnā-Burhiā* or *Cha'ā Pāchcho* is kept, and offers the *chuirā* to the deity. Thereafter, the *Pāhān* distributes these *chiurā* to the assembled villagers. After the performance of the *Nawā-Khāni* ceremony by the *Pāhān*, the other villagers celebrate it. No sacrifice is generally made in this festival as is done by the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

Among different castes of lower Bengal, the ceremony of the "Eating of New Rice" of the field is also prevalent. The festival is locally known as *Nabānna*, and generally takes place in the month of *Agrāhayan* (November-December) or *Pous* (December-January) when the *Āman* paddy ripens.

Before storing this rice, on an auspicious day, they offer it to the Goddess *Lakṣmī*. The Brahmin priest generally conducts the *pujā*.

Thus, from the above, it is seen that among the Orāons of both the areas as also among the different Hindu castes of Deltaic Bengal, the festival of 'Eating the New Rice of the Field' is observed as a thanks-giving ceremony to the deities. The rites observed in connection with this festival, vary among these groups, but the core conception of this festival is almost identical among them.

(3) MANASA PUJA

Manasā is regarded as a household deity and is worshipped in the month of *Vādra* (August-September). On the day before the *pujā*, the female folk of the household cleanse the house and courtyard as is done in other festivals. The articles generally required for this worship are *āruā* rice, *hāndiā* (rice-beer), banana, unboiled milk, sweets, *Tulsijal*, one duck, lighted earthen lamp etc. After taking bath, the worshipper makes necessary arrangement for the *pujā*. He sits on the eastern side, facing westward, of the cleansed portion of the courtyard or the main hut specially meant for *pujā*. The worshipper observes fast till the *pujā* ends.

At first, he sanctifies the articles of the *pujā* with sacred *Tulsijal* and puts a handful of *āruā* rice on the spot or *Thān* (altar) made for the worship. Then he offers milk and banana to the Goddess *Manasā* in the following way :—

Taking a little milk from the brass pot on the right palm, he pours it on the heap of *āruā* rice. This process is repeated thrice. Then the pieces of the ripe banana are also offered in the same way. With each offering, he utters the name of *Manasā*.

Then he sacrifices the duck (after going through the same procedure as is done in *Āshvīn Pujā*) uttering the name of *Manasā* along with the following prayer thrice :—

Ghās Khore Hāmṛā Rātbikār Ghusthi.
Kono Āghāt Nā Debi.....

[‘Oh Goddess *Manasā*, we work in the field day and night. Save us from (snake) bites’.]

After the sacrifice, the head and the body of the duck are kept by the side of the altar. Here no blood-stained feather is kept as is done in other *pujās*. Then a little water is poured on the rick of rice and after this the head of the duck is baked in the oven by the wife of the worshipper and a little portion of it is offered to the deity. Again water is poured thrice.

This marks the end of the *pujā*. No *Tahari* is prepared, no liquor (*hāndiā*) is offered to the deity unlike the other two festivities described earlier. Later on, curry is prepared with the body of the sacrificed duck and taken by all the members of the family belonging to the same sib as that of the worshipper.

The Goddess *Manasā* is worshipped with the belief that she will save the members of the family and the domesticated animals from snake-bites.

In Chitā-Nāgpur among the Orāons Goddess *Manasā* is worshipped only by a particular sect i.e. *Nāg-mātis* or the snake-doctors. The *Nāg-māti* worships *Manasā* in *Deothān* (altar) once in the month of *Jeth* (May-June) and once in *Āshar* (June-July). The *Nāg-māti* together with his disciples, observes fast for the whole day, and in the evening, he sacrifices a fowl on behalf of himself and his disciples. Thereafter, they sing, in chorus, the songs that glorify *Manasā*. In this *pujā*, “At first the poison will be sent upwards by *mantras* in which all known species of snakes are named. Then the poison is sent down (*jhārṇā*) by appropriate *mantras*” (Roy: 1928: 303).

In Sunderban, among different Hindu castes and communities, *Manasā* is worshipped in the household as well as in the community levels. In some cases (generally in cases of community festivals and in a few cases of household *pujās*) earthen effigy of goddess *Manasā* is made. The articles that are important for this *pujā*, are unboiled milk and banana, though other articles such as flowers, sweets, *Bel-leaves* (wood-apple leaves) etc. are also required. Generally no sacrifice is

made, but in cases of some *pujās* observed in community level as well as in cases of some household *pujās*, where a vow is made of a goat or a pigeon or a duck, is sacrificed and offered to the deity. This *pujā* generally takes place in the month of *Srāvan* (July-August) or *Vādro* (Aug-Sept) during the morning hours of an auspicious day i.e. this *pujā* is generally held during rainy season, when the risk of snake bite increases. A Brahmin is employed for the *pujā* who is generally paid for his service both in cash and kind.

The concept behind this *pujā* is almost identical among the Orāons of Sunderban, *Nag Mātis* of Chotā-Nāgpur and also among the backward and semi-backward castes of the Sunderban area. But the method of worship varies considerably between the two regions. The method followed by the Sunderban Orāons, is quite similar to that of the Hindu inhabitants around them from whom they have borrowed the idea of this goddess.

(4) KARAM PUJA

The *Karam* festival, was originally a Hindu festival. In connection with this festival of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur. Roy says. "The *Karam* festival, which is celebrated on the day after *Kādloṭā*, has been borrowed by the Orāons from their Hindu or semi-Hinduised neighbours and, in a manner, incorporated with the *Kādloṭā* festival of which it now practically forms a part" (1928: 240). Gradually with the march of time the Orāons have remodelled this festival and made it their own.

It will not be wrong to assume that when the Orāons migrated to the Sunderban area, they brought along with them many of their traditional beliefs and customs, and the *Karam* festival is also one of them. But due to Hindu influence, scarcity of *Karam* (*Nauclea Parvifolia*) trees and other causes, most of them at present have given up this festival. Those few Orāons who still practise this festival, say that it is their customary practice, and should continue from generation to generation. On the whole, it may be said that the *Karam*

festival of the present-day Orāons of Sunderban is a greatly modified form of the traditional form of the Ranchi Orāons. Here, it may be pointed out that the *Karam* festival which is practised by the Orāons of Deltaic Bengal, is not associated with any other festival whereas it is associated with *Kādloṭā* festival by the Ranchi Orāon. *Karam* festival is generally observed in the month of *Āswīn* (Sept.-Oct.) in Sunderban when the Hindus celebrate *Durgapujā*. In this festival the deity *Karam Rājā* is represented by a branch of *Karam* or *Karanj* or *Gambhir* tree.

But in Chotā-Nāgpur on the eleventh day after *Kadlota* festival in the month of *Vādro* (Aug.-Sept.), the Orāons celebrate *Karam* festival. Three *Karam* (*Nauclea parvifolia*) branches are installed as *Karam Raja* or *King-Karam*.

The head of the family of an Orāon household in the Sunderban area, rises early in the morning on the festive day and takes bath. After bath, wearing a new or clean *dhuti* and covering the upper portion of the body with *chādar* (sheet), he starts for bringing the branches of *Karam*, taking with him a new red napkin (*Lāl-gamchha*) and a scythe. Reaching the place where the *Karam* tree is situated, he takes the permission from the owner of the tree for cutting a few branches. After getting the permission, he keeps Rs. 1.25 on the ground under the tree as the price of the branches of the *Karam* tree.

Then a man climbs up the tree and cuts a branch of it by means of a scythe. Before cutting the branch, a red thread of the new red napkin (*Lāl-gamchā*) is tied round the branch. The worshipper, without allowing it to fall down or to touch the ground, holds the cut branch, covering it with the new red napkin, and brings it home secretly and throws the branch within a pond. In the afternoon of the day, the womenfolk search for the branch which they ultimately trace out. This role of the women is perhaps the relic of their old tradition as in Chotā-Nāgpur area "The *Karam* is essentially a festival of women and particularly of maidens". (Roy : 1928 : 242).

In the evening, it is planted in a particular portion of the

courtyard, specially cleaned and designed (*ālpānā*) for the *pujā*. An umbrella is generally tied with the twig so that no impure object can fall on it.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, the process of cutting and bringing of *Karam* branches is somewhat different from those of Deltaic Bengal. Generally, the young Orāon bachelors, in a body, on the day following *Kādloṭā* festival, go to cut and bring three *Karam* (*Nauclea parvifolia*) branches, accompanied with dancing, singing and playing musical instruments. In some villages, *Pāhān* (priest) along with *Pujār* (assistant to the priest) goes to the jungle and anoints the branches of *Karam* tree with vermilion. The *Pujār*, who takes an axe, with him, hands it over to the boys for cutting those branches bedoubed with vermilion. The branches, so selected, are not allowed to fall to or touch the ground. In the meantime, the Orāon maidens, in a body, go to collect white *Pakhna* flowers singing, dancing etc. After collecting *Pakhna* flowers, they again collect and fill the baskets, known as *Karam-dowri*, with *bodi* (*Vigna catiāng*), *urid* (*Phaseolus roxburghii*), *barai* (*Phaseolus mungo*) and other grains.

After cutting the *Karam* branches, three young Orāon bachelors, linked hand in hand, carry the branches, and others follow them singing and dancing etc. In some Orāon villages in Chotā-Nāgpur, where there is a *Māti*, he goes to the forest, (before the bachelors), to cut tree with his disciples and teaches them the characteristics and properties of different medicinal plants, roots etc.

The bachelors bring the *Karam* branches to the *ākhrā* (dancing ground) and ceremonially plant these in the middle of the *ākhrā*.

Among the Orāons of the Sunderban area, the articles required for this *pujā* are flowers of different types (such as Water-lily, Merigold, Chinrose etc.), leaves of woodapple, incense, vermilion, ghee (clarified butter), rice, banana, sweets, rice-beer etc.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, different grains (as stated above), a quantity of barley or maize shoots, cucumber flowers etc. are required.

During the first phase of the *pujā* in Sunderban, the articles are offered to *Karam Rājā* by the village priest. In the second phase the worshipper stands up facing west and holds the animal to be sacrificed (generally goat) by the left hand and a little *āruā* rice in the right hand, and utters the name of *Karam Rājā*. After this, he sits down and feeds the goat with the *āruā* rice. This process is repeated thrice after which he beheads it with a *Kātān* (large knife). The head of the animal is kept by the side of the *Karam* branch which is stained with a few drops of blood of the sacrificed animal.

With the head and the body of sacrificed animal and with the *āruā* rice, *Tahari* is prepared and little portion of it is offered first to *Karam Rājā*. Then the worshipper or any other elderly villager sings the glory of *Karam Rājā* (one of such stories has been described in the chapter on Folklore etc.) with music, and it continues for the whole night.

Next morning the branch is ceremonially immersed in a nearby pond or river.

This marks the end of the *Karam* festival of the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

In Ranchi district a peculiar custom is prevalent in connection with *Karam* festival. It concerns with the germination of barley seeds. "The germination of the barley-seeds has been sought to be hastened by the maidens who have been for the preceeding nine days carefully sprinkling water over them and sitting up late at night singing songs to them and watching them germinating" (Roy : 1928 : 244). These maidens must not take fish, meat etc. for those days.

On the morning of the festive day, the young men and women sit round the *Karam* branches, and the *Pāhān* relates the *Karam Kāhini* i.e. story connected with the *Karam*. After hearing the *Karam* legend, all the young men and women make offerings to the *Karam Rājā* with flowers, *dahi* (curds), *āruā* rice and other grains. After offering some barley-shoots to *Karam* deity, these are distributed to the young ones who generally put these in their hair. After this, they bow before the *Karam Rājā*. The *Karam* branches are then taken by three maidens accompanied with music and dance to *Pāhān's*

house, then to *Māhāto's* house and lastly to *Pujār's* house, and in each house the mistress of the household anoints these branches with oil and vermilion, and after this the branches are immersed in the stream.

Besides this *Karam* festival, which is also known as *Rāi Param* among the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons, there are other *Karam* festivals such as :—

- (i) *Dasāi Karam*—held in the full-moon day of *Āswīn* (Sept.-Oct.) when the Hindus celebrate *Dasāi* or *Daśa-harā* festival. Perhaps the *Karam* festival of the Orāons of Sunderban is the relic of this *Dasāi Karam* festival.
- (ii) *Soharāi Karam*—held in connection with the *Soharāi* festival in the month of *Kārtick* (October-November).
- (iii) *Jitiā Karam*—celebrated in the same day as the *Jitiā* festival in the month of August or September.
- (iv) *Burhi Karam*—observed once in every three years in the month of July, etc.

In Sunderban, the Orāons do not observe all these different types of *Karam* festival. The different Hindu castes of this area instead of observing *Karam* festival, celebrate *Durgā Pujā*, one of the most important festivals of the locality.

(5) LAKSMI PUJA

A few Hinduised Orāons of the Sunderban area worship *Laksmi* on the full-moon day of the month of *Āswīn* (Sept.-Oct.), the same day when the Hindus also worship *Laksmi* (which is known sometimes as *Kojāgori Laksmi pujā*). Generally those Orāons, who perform *Laksmi pujā*, engage a Hindu Brahmin or a Vaisnab for worshipping this deity. The Hinduised procedures are followed in the *pujā*.

The articles required for the *pujā* are *āruā* rice, fruits, flowers, basil leaves, wood-apple leaves, sweets, milk, incense, incenseburner, lamp etc.

A portion of the main hut is cleansed and plastered in the morning with cow-dung paste, and a small earthen platform is generally raised in the centre of the cleansed portion, and

is considered as *Thān*. No earthen effigy of the Goddess *Laksmī* is generally made for the *pujā*. In the evening, just before the start of the *pujā*, the female folks of the household, after taking bath, arrange the articles meant for the *pujā* round the *Thān*. The lamp is lighted and the fire is put in incense burner. The priest then sits for the *pujā*. After sanctifying all the articles of the *pujā*, the priest offers the flowers and other articles to the goddess uttering *mantras* (incantations). Then he revolves the lighted lamp and also the incense burner, each thrice, round the *Thān*. At this time, the women folk blow conch-shells and utter 'ulu' 'ulu' sounds. After this, he recites the glory of *Laksmī* (the goddess of wealth) from *Laksmī Pāñchālī* (poems glorifying *Laksmī*).

When the *puja* is over, *Prāsād* is distributed to every one. Next day the articles, used in the *pujā*, are taken to a nearby pond or canal or river accompanied with music for immersion. A few persons, who set up effigy of the goddess for the *pujā* immerse the same along with other articles used in the worship in the same way as described above or keep the effigy of the Goddess *Laksmī* till the next *Laksmī puja*, when the old effigy of the goddess is immersed and the new one is worshipped. The Brahmin is given a remuneration in cash and kind for his work.

The Hindu inhabitants of Sunderban also worship the Goddess *Laksmī*, and it is a common worship amongst them. Almost all the houses celebrate this festival, and a Brahmin acts as priest for which he is given remuneration in cash and kind. The earthen effigy is not always made, and sometimes a picture or a metal effigy of the deity is also worshiped.

But the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur do not worship the Goddess *Laksmī*, unlike the Orāons of estuarine Bengal. The immigrant Orāons of Sunderban borrowed this deity from the local Hindus. The Goddess *Laksmī* is also regarded by them as the goddess of wealth like the local Hindus.

(6) GOREYA PUJA AND SOHARAI FESTIVAL

On the new-moon day of the month of *Kārtick* (Oct.-

Nov.), the *Goreyā Pujā* or *Goāl Pujā* is generally observed. The female folks of the household cleanse the house, courtyard and cowshed, and paint the walls of the cowshed with a number of decorative designs of flowers etc. drawn with a paste of powdered *āruā* rice.

The following articles are required for the worship :—*Āruā* rice, rice-beer (*hāndiā*), vermilion, fowls etc. Though the number and the colour of the fowls vary from house to house still one of the fowls must be a white one to be offered to *Dharma*.

In the morning of the festive day the worshipper (senior-most male member of the family), after taking bath and wearing new or clean clothes, washes the hoofs of the cattle. Thereafter, he sits facing westward on the western portion of the cowshed which is generally specially cleansed for the *pujā*. A branch of the *Garān* tree is planted on that place which represents *Gareyā*, and in front of this branch the worshipper keeps some heaps of rice (the number of which varies according to the number of sacrifices to be made).

First of all the priest sacrifices the white fowl by the name of *Dharma* or the Supreme Deity in a similar way as is done in other festivals. Thereafter, he offers and sacrifices other fowls to *Goreyā* with a prayer for the welfare of the cattle and other domestic animals. The heads of the fowls are then placed by the side of each of the heaps of rice, while the bodies are kept aside. One feather from each of the fowls, stained with blood, is also kept on the respective heap of rice. Afterwards, the worshipper pours a little *hāndiā* (rice-beer) on each heap, and bows before the deities. With the bodies of these sacrificed animals, *Tahari* is prepared, and a little of it is, first of all, offered thrice to *Dharma*, then to *Goreyā*. A little liquor and water are also offered to each of them thrice. Then he paints the foreheads of the cattle, and also the walls of the cowshed and the main house with the sacred vermilion of the *pujā*.

When the *puja* is over, all the members of the family belonging to the same sib as that of the worshipper, take *Tahari* as *Prasād*.

The *Goreyā* is worshipped for the welfare of the domesticated animals, mainly the cattle. The cattle are not employed in any work on this *pujā* day. In the night of the same day, *Soharāi* festival is observed. This festival of the Sunderban Orāons is not associated with any religious rite, but observed only for merry-making by the youngsters. The young Orāons, after drinking 'hāndiā' to their hearts' content and wearing colourful dresses, visit each and every house of the village accompanied with music and sometimes with queer dances, and ask for gifts of rice, vegetables, coins etc. With these collected materials, they generally arrange a feast.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, *Gorāiā*, *Gonreā* or *Gohār Deotā* i.e., cattleshed-spirit is worshipped by the Orāons on the new-moon day (*Āmwas*) of the month of *Kārtick* (Oct.-Nov.), when *Soharāi* festival takes place. This cattle-shed spirit is also sometimes termed as *Laksmi*, the goddess of wealth, of the Hindus. *Goreyā* is never regarded as *Laksmi* by the Orāons of Sunderban. In the *Gorāiā Pujā* of the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons a number of lighted earthen lamps, incense, incense-burner, rice-beer, *urid*, *māruā*, *āruā* rice, fowl etc. are required. A special food is also prepared for the cattle with *urid* (*Phaseolus roxburghii*), *māruā* (*Elusine corocana*) and *bodi* (*Vigna catiang*) boiled together.

On the morning of the festive day, cattle are taken to a nearby water source for being washed, and after their return to the shed, the women folk of the household sprinkle rice-beer on their hoofs and give pieces of *O!* (*colocasia-antiquorum*) mixed with salt to the cattle. Thereafter, the special food, prepared earlier for these cattle, is given to them, and their horns and foreheads are anointed with the paste of vermilion and oil. Sometimes a fowl is sacrificed in the cattle-shed and offered to the presiding deity *Gorāiā* or *Gonreā* or *Gohār Deotā*.

In the same day, as also on the next day, a few young Orāon boys dressed with straw and decked with flowers, go from house to house and collect different types of articles in the same way as is done by the Sunderban Orāon boys. The Ranchi Orāons also believe that these young boys are also sup-

posed to drive away the mosquito and fleas. These boys in Ranchi are termed as *Dundu*, and the begging and flea driving is known as *Dasā-masā*. The village Āhir (Milkman) goes to the house of the village *Pāhān* (priest) where the *Pāhānāin* (wife of the priest) washes his feet. Thereafter, the Āhir sits on a mat and is given rice-beer in a brass cup for drinking. From the *Pāhān's* house the Āhir with his wife, visits those houses whose cattle he generally tends. In each house, the house-wife washes his feet and gives him rice-beer to drink. He is also given some coins and grains. Then the Āhirs of different neighbouring villages perform a *Jātrā*.

Roy is of opinion that the *Soharāi* has obviously been borrowed by the Orāons from the Hindu caste, mainly the cattle-tending Ahirs (1928: 234), and this tutelary deity of the cattle-shed has been associated with the Orāon household spirits of Chotā-Nāgpur under the name of *Goesāl Nād*. The Ahir caste, even today in Ranchi district, observes this festival with much pomp and grandeur. But the present-day Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur do not observe the festival with all its details as done by the Ahirs.

In Sunderban different backward castes and communities observe *Goāl Pujā* in which they worship the presiding deity of the cattleshed. Specially the *Goālās* (Milk traders) celebrate this festival in detail with offerings of different articles such as flowers, fruits, sweets, rice etc. by the Brahmin who acts as the priest. In a few cases a goat is sometimes sacrificed.

(7) KALI PUJA

This festival in the month of *Kārtick* (October-November), is performed by those Sunderban Orāons only who keep buffaloes. The deity concerned is considered as the guardian deity of the buffaloes ensuring their welfare.

In the night of the new moon day (*Amābashyā*) of the month of *Kārtick* (October-November), *Kālī pujā* is observed by these people.

In the morning of the festive day, the women folk of the household clean the house, courtyard and specially the

buffalo-shed with cow-dung ^{for} earth-paste as done in other festivities. In the western corner of the buffalo-shed, a *Thān* is raised for the *pujā*. Image of *Kālī* is generally not made for the worship. Different articles such as vermilion, *āruā* rice, rice-beer, lamp, fowl etc. are required.

In the evening or at night, the head of the family (who generally performs this worship), after washing the hoofs of the buffaloes, sits on the east side of the *Thān* facing westward, and the articles are arranged by the side of the *Thān*.

First of all, the worshipper offers different articles to the deity, and as soon as it is over, he puts a small heap of rice on the ground. Thereafter, he takes the fowl to be sacrificed in his left hand and feeds it with *āruā* rice from the heap and utters the name of the deity, dropping a few grains of *āruā* rice on its head. This process is repeated thrice after which he sacrifices the fowl and offers it to the deity.

Then the sacrificed fowl and *āruā* rice are given to the female-folk of the household for preparing *Tahari*. When the *Tahari* is prepared, a little of it is, first of all, offered to the Goddess *Kālī*. The worshipper then annoints the heads of the buffaloes with the sacred vermilion of the *pujā*. Marks are also put with this sacred vermilion in different portions of the buffalo-shed as also of the main hut. At the end, the *Tahari* is distributed among the family members having the same *gotro* (sib) as that of the worshipper. A feast is also given to the assembled guests after the *pujā*. On this particular day, the buffaloes are not employed in any work.

This *Kālī Pujā* of the Orāons of Sunderban meant for the buffaloes, is not observed by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, but is prevalent among a very few backward castes and communities of the Sunderban area. In Ranchi district, a few families, who own buffaloes, worship *Gorāiā* by sacrificing a black pig. They, first of all, wash the hoofs of the buffaloes and mark the fore-heads and the horns with the paste of vermilion and oil. Then the legs of the pig meant for the sacrifice, are washed with water and its head is bedaubed with vermilion paste etc. Thereafter, it is fed with a handful of *āruā* rice. "The pig is then dragged over the ground

and thus taken, struggling and squeaking, to the place where the buffaloes have been let loose. The buffaloes, excited and frightened by the squeaking and grunting of the pigs, gore the pig to death with their horns". (Roy: 1928: 232).

It may be seen from the above that though the conception behind this festival is practically identical among the Orāons of both the areas still the rituals observed and deities connected with the festival differ considerably from one another. These differences may be attributed to the differences in the environmental influences concerned. It may be noted that though this festival goes under the name of *Kālī Pujā* among the Sunderban Orāons, it is quite different from the *Kālī Pujā* where *Kālī* (*Mā Kālī*) is regarded as the Mother-Goddess.

(8) NARAYAN PUJA

The worship of Lord *Nārāyan*, one of the Supreme Deities of the Hindus, is prevalent among a few Sunderban Orāons most of whom have adopted this for a particular reason or so. A specific instance is given below. Bhāddar Bāro of the hamlet Kuprekhāli, village Boyārmāri, adopted the worship of this deity from the Hindus for having his child's life saved from serious illness. Nine years back in the year 1955 (1361 B.S.) in the month of *Agrāhayan* (November-December), his eldest son was seriously ill, and all treatments (indigenous as well as modern) failed to give him relief. Then on the advice of some Hindus, as a last resort, he took vow by the name of Lord *Nārāyan* that if his son would be cured by the grace of Lord *Nārāyan* then he would start the worship of Lord *Nārāyan* regularly. His son's life was saved by Lord *Nārāyan*, and Bhāddar Bāro started worshipping Lord *Nārāyan* in the month of *Māgh* (December-January), and still continues the same.

There is no fixed date for the worship of Lord *Nārāyan* among the Orāons. The worship is generally conducted by a Brahmin priest. Different articles such as a new red boardered *sāri*, a new red boardered *dhuti*, one napkin (*Gāmchhā*), flour, sugar, sweets (*Sandesh*, molaces etc.), a basket known as

Laksmir Jhāpi containing paddy, betel, betel-nut, flower, lamp, incense, incense-burner, wood-apple leaves, basil leaves, a new earthen jar etc. are required for the worship. The earthen jar (*ghat*) is considered as the seat of Lord *Nārāyan*.

In the morning, before the *pujā* starts, the womenfolk of the household clean the entire house with cowdung, and a corner of the main room is specially prepared for this *pujā*. The Brahmin priest, after sanctifying all the articles with *Tulsi-jal* or *Gangā-jal*, places the earthen jar (*Ghat*), the seat of Lord *Nārāyan*, and starts the worship. First of all, he offers different articles by uttering *mantras* (incantations). After this, the lighted earthen lamp and then the burning incense are moved round the (*Ghat*) thrice, and the assembled women folk start blowing the conch-shells and give “*ulu*” “*ulu*” sounds. Lastly *Sinni* (a paste of milk, sweets, banana and flour) is offered to Lord *Nārāyan*, and the priest starts reciting the glory of the deity.

When the *pujā* is over, the priest blesses and distributes *Prasād* to every one. The Brahmin gets Rs. 1.25 and some fruits, *āruā* rice etc. as remuneration for his service. He also gets the new *dhuti* and the napkin used in the *pujā*. The women folk then pour the paddy kept in the *basket* (known as *Laksmir Jhāpi*), into the paddy kept in the grain-golās.

Next morning the *ghat* is immersed in the neighbouring pond or canal or river.

The worship of this deity is not prevalent among the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons but this *pujā* is performed in many Hindu houses of Sunderban as also of different parts of West Bengal. The worship of this deity has evidently been borrowed from the local Hindus by the immigrant Orāons.

(9) SARASWATI PUJA

Saraswati, regarded as the goddess of learning by the Hindus, is worshipped only by a few Hinduised Orāons of Sunderban who have school-going children. Like the Hindus,

they believe that if the Goddess *Saraswati* is propitiated, their children will be learned fellows.

On the fifth day after the new-moon in the month of *Māgh* (January-February), the *Saraswati puja* is celebrated by the Hindus as also by the Orāons of Sunderban.

The Orāons engage a Hindu Brahmin or a Vaiṣṇab to perform this *pujā*. The following articles are required for the same: milk, *āruā* rice, sweets, fruits, reed-pen, ink, flowers, wood-apple leaves, *Tulsi-jal*, *Gangājal* etc.

Early in the morning, the women folk of the household clean the house and prepare a *Thān* in the same way as done in other festivals. Sometimes, they purchase an earth-image of the deity and install it on the *Thān*. At an auspicious hour (determined by the Brahmin priest after consulting the almanac) the Brahmin priest starts worshipping the deity. In the meantime, the femalefolk of the house, after taking bath and wearing clean clothes, clean and arrange the articles of the *pujā* near the *Thān*. The priest, first of all, sanctifies all the articles and the persons gathered by sprinkling sacred *Gāngajal* etc. Then he utters incantations and offers different articles to the deity, and revolves the lighted lamp and the incense burner thrice, round the image of the deity on the *Thān* as the case may be. Afterwards, when all these are over, he gives every one, specially the school-going children, some flowers with which they offer homage to the deity. The process is repeated thrice by repeating the incantation as recited by the Brahmin priest.

Next day the image of the deity along with the articles used in the *pujā*, and in the absence of the image only the articles are taken to a tank or nearby canal or river in a procession in which the boys cry with joy, play drums, flutes and metal bells etc. Reaching the place of immersion, they revolve the image and the articles thrice and then immerse these in water.

The Ranchi Orāons do not celebrate any such *pujā*. The Hindu populace of Deltaic Bengal like the caste people of other parts of West Bengal, celebrate it on household as well as community levels. The method of worship is identical,

and there is no doubt that this festival also has been borrowed by these immigrant Orāons from the local Hindus.

(10) SITALA PUJA

Goddess *Sitalā* is generally worshipped in the month of *Fālgun* (February-March), when out-breaks of Small-pox epidemic usually start or are apprehended. The following articles are generally required for the *pujā*, viz. *āruā* rice, sweets, fruits, flowers, lamp, vermilion, incense etc. The house, courtyard etc. are thoroughly cleaned by the female-folk as in the case of other festivals. A portion of the courtyard or the main hut is specially cleaned and utilised as *Thān*. No image of the deity is generally set up for the *pujā*.

On the morning of the day of the *pujā*, the worshipper (generally the eldest male member of the family) sits by the side of the *Thān* after taking bath and wearing new or clean clothes. After sanctifying the articles, he starts the *pujā*. First of all, he makes a heap of rice on the ground, and offers different articles to the presiding deity. Thereafter, he takes the animal (sheep or goat generally, and in some cases fowl) and feeds it with the *āruā* rice from the rick of rice. When it starts taking the *āruā* rice, the worshipper drops a few grains on its head and stands up uttering the name of *Sitalā*. This process is repeated thrice. Thereafter, he sacrifices the animal with a knife and pours a little of the blood on the heap of the rice. The assembled persons then bow down before the deity.

After this, with the body of the sacrificed animal, a curry is prepared and a feast generally follows.

Worship of *Sitalā* is absent among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur. But the backward and semi-backward classes of the Sunderban area regularly worship goddess *Sitalā*. In the *Sitalā talā* (the abode of *Sitalā*), the deity is worshipped on community level, and on the house-hold level it is worshipped in respective houses. On both the levels, a Brahmin generally acts as the priest and a goat or a sheep is generally sacrificed and offered to the deity.

The worship of this deity is also borrowed by the Sunderban Orāons from the neighbouring castes around them.

(11) SURJĀHI PUJA

During *Bheḷoā-phāri* festival. *Dharma*, the Supreme Deity, is worshipped along with *Kālī* and other deities, but *Dharma* alone is worshipped during *Surjāhi Pujā* by some Orāon families of Sunderban. It is performed once in a few years, in the month of *Fālgun* (February-March), the head of the household generally acting as the priest. The usual articles required are almost similar to other *pujās* but a white cock (*Sānrā*) or a white chicken (*Kātrū*) is also required for sacrifice. The *pujā* is generally held in the morning hours in one portion of the courtward or in the main hut. In either case, the western side is selected. The worshipper, after taking bath and wearing clean clothes, sits on the eastern side facing westward. The articles for *pujā*, are kept round the place of worship, and the worshipper sprinkles sacred water for sanctifying the same. Then he offers different articles to the deity, and thereafter sacrifices the animal in the same way as described in connection with other festivals. After the sacrifice the head of the fowl is kept by the side of the heap of rice for sometime. Then he bows before the deity along with other family members, after which the head and the body of the fowl and some *āruā* rice are given to the women folk for preparing *Tahari*. Afterwards, a little *Tahari*, rice-beer and water are offered to the deity, and then the worshipper distributes the *Tahari* among the family members as *Prasād* and a feast follows thereafter.

In Chotā-Nāgpur also, among the Orāons the *Surjāhi Pujā* is prevalent. In the month of *Agrāhayan* (November-December) in an auspicious day, the *pujā* is performed. A white goat or a white cock, *āruā* rice, vermilion and new earthen cooking pots, pulses, vegetables, a knife etc. are required for the *pujā*. A portion of a particular *Dānr* or upland which has been cleaned and bedaubed with cow-dung paste is selected for this *pujā*. Generally, an upland by the side of a stream or

a tank is selected for the purpose. Men and women, members of the *Pāñch* etc. assemble in the place of worship. In their presence, the officiator sacrifices the animal and offers it to the *Surjāhi* (Sun-spirit) i.e. *Dharmes*.

The *Surjāhi Pujā* is performed once in a few years for the propagation of the family.

(12) SARHUL FESTIVAL

The *Sārhuḷ* festival is celebrated by the Orāons of Sunderban at household level in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April), when the mango twigs start blossoming and nature is decorated with spring-time flowers. On the day of this festival, no one would go to the field for his usual work as this particular day is meant for joy and relaxation.

The Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons still observe *Sārhuḷ* festival at the community level (unlike Sunderban Orāons who observe it at the household level) in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April), as that of the Sunderban Orāons do. When the blossoming of the *Sāl* flowers forms the most striking feature in nature "the Orāons hold a religious festival in spring in their sacred grove or *Sarnā*, in which *Sāl* blossoms form an essential element, and which is popularly known as the *Sarhūḷ* or the Feast of *Sāl* blossoms, but which the Orāons in their own language name as *Khāddi* and also *Khekhel-benjā* or the Marriage of the Earth". (Roy : 1928 : 194).

To the Sunderban Orāons, this festival is essentially a festival concerning new vegetation and is considered to be one of the most important festivals of their society. As the Mango is considered the first fruit of the year and Nim flower as the first flower, no one among them would take either of these till the *Sārhuḷ* festival has been celebrated.

In Chotā-Nāgpur area also the Orāons have similar type of conception regarding this festival. They also do not gather *Sāl* flower or use the new fruits, flowers and edible leaves etc. of the season till the celebration of the *Sārhuḷ* festival. "This Feast of *Sāl* Flowers, which is essentially the feast of New

Vegetation, forms with its elaborate ritual the principal religious festival of the Orāons" (Roy: 1928: 194).

In the month of *Chaitra*, before starting of the first plough in the field, the *Ojhā* or the priest of the village of the Sunderban Orāons consults the *Bhakat* (assistant to the priest) and also some elderly and influential persons of the village for fixing up a date for the *Sārḥul* festival.

The *Gunin* helps in the selection by finding out an auspicious day with the help of some magical means. This date is announced to the villagers by the *Ojhā* or *Pāhān* (priest), *Bhakat* (assistant to the priest) or members of the Panchāyet so that the date is known to everybody in the village.

In Ranchi district also "When in early spring the *Sāl* trees begin to blossom, the village elders in every Orāons village hold a consultation and appoint a day for celebrating the *Sārḥul* in their village". (Roy: 1928: 194).

The following articles are required by the Orāons of Sunderban area for this festival :—

Rice-beer, *āruā* rice, incense burner, vermilion, flowers, leaves of wood apple, *Tu'sijal*, *Gangājal*, jackfruit, green mango, flowering branches of *Nim*, fowls (at least one of which should be white in colour), red thread etc. The priest or his assistant goes round from house to house for collecting rice which is utilised for the preparation of *Sārḥulmad* (rice-beer for *Sārḥul*).

In Chotā-Nāgpur tract also, after the date for the festival is fixed, rice or *māruā* is collected from house to house by the *Pāhān* and the *Pujār*, and the money obtained by selling these grains is utilised for procuring the necessary articles for the ceremony e.g. earthen-ware vessels, *Pāhān chhuri* or the knife to be used by the *Pāhān* in the festival, iron *Karchhul* (large spoon), ingredients for a number of jars of *arkhi* (home-brewn liquor) etc.

Every Orāon household in Sunderban prepares the sacred *Sārḥulmad* or rice-beer for *Sārḥul* three days prior to the festival proper. A quantity of rice is boiled with water for a short time till a paste is formed. The vessel is then unhearthed and its contents are spread on a clean mat for cooling. When

it sufficiently cools down, some fermenting material (viz. tablets of Yeast etc). are mixed with it thoroughly. Then it is poured into a number of new earthen vessels, specially bought for *Sārhuḷ* festival. Sufficient quantity of water is poured into each of these vessels and the whole thing stirred well. Each vessel is covered and sealed well and kept in a cool and dark corner of the house.

In three days, the contents of the vessel become fermented and this is taken to the village *Thān*. No one is allowed to take this rice-beer before the end of the festival.

Among the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons also, three days prior to *Sārhuḷ*, a large quantity of home-brewn liquor is prepared in the *Pāhān's* or in the *Pujār's* house in a similar way. "On the *Sārhuḷ* day, these jars are taken to the *sarnā* groove and there more water is poured into the contents and the mixture is strained with a cloth sieve and the liquor thus prepared is drunk only by the *Pāhān*, the *Pūjār* and the *Māhto* of the village". (Roy: 1928: 195).

On the *pujā* day, the Sunderban Orāons clean their respective houses, courtyards etc. with cow-dung paste. A portion in the western side of the house is specially prepared which serves the purpose of *Thān* during the *pujā*. In the meantime, the *Ojhā* or the priest goes out with a number of villagers in the nearby canal or pond for taking bath. The village drummers beat their drums and play their flute loudly creating a sensation among the villagers. The *Ojhā* and others after bath, wear new or clean white borderless *dhuti* and go to their respective houses for performing the *pujā*. The persons who perform the *pujā* at the household level remain fasting till the ceremony is over.

In Chotā-Nāgpur area the *Pujār* accompanied by a number of persons goes to the sacred or *Sārnādāri* (*Chālā Toosā*) at sunrise on the day before *Sārhuḷ* festival where they bale out all the water of the spring by means of new pans and after baling out the water, the *Pujār* anoints a stone with vermilion (*isum sindri*). Then they return and take *spring-bailing liquor* (*dāri-chhitnā-hānri*). The whole procedure is known as *Dari-chhitana* or *Toosā-chhechdam*.

On the same day *Chigri-gāddā* ceremony is observed in which two tall bamboo poles are planted, one on each side in front of the doorway—from which small flags known as *Chāndi Jhāndā* are hung up, and these flags afterwards are stored in a bamboo basket.

After observing this rite the *Pujār* and the *Pāhān* or the *Māhto* or some other persons bring the omen-indicating water (*Neg-amm*) in four earthen jars from *Sarnādāri*, and these are kept in *Sarnā* or sacred grove. At sunrise the *Pāhān*, the *Pujār* and other elderly persons examine the water and read omens from it.

After this they take liquor and other villagers start for collecting fowl for sacrifice, fish for *dubki tian*—a curry, and crabs for magical rite. In the meantime the *Pāhān*, the *Pujār* and other village elders go to a stream or tank for taking ceremonial bath accompanied by *Gorāils* (musicians) playing at their musical instruments. Afterwards in the *Pāhān's* house men and women assemble, where water is poured on the women till they are drenched. The women sing obscene songs and utter filthy abuses. Then the *Pāhān*, the *Pujār* and others make preparation for the *pujā*. The villagers bring their offerings and the fowls to be sacrificed at *Pāhān's* house. Then the "*Pāhān* comes up and sprinkles a little of the newly brewed rice-beer on the *sarnā-sūp* or winnowing-fan (*Keter*) used in ceremonies at the *sarnā* (sacred-grove) and at other times hung up inside the *Pāhān's* house." (Roy: 1928: 202). Then a mock marriage (*Isum sindri*) between the *Pāhān* and the *Pāhānāin* takes place. In this rite, the *Pāhān* and his wife are covered, with a cloth and the *Māhto's* wife or some other elderly woman rubs the *Pāhān's* head with mustard oil and combs his hair and lastly, puts vermilion marks on his forehead and temples. The *Pāhānāin*, the *Pujār* and his wife are also treated similarly. The *Māhto* or the *Pāhān* then invokes the ancestor-spirits. At the end of this, they all go to the sacred grove in a ceremonial procession (*Chhālānu Gūchā*).

After taking bath, the worshipper in the Sunderban area starts worshipping the deities sitting in the eastern side of

the *Thān*, facing westward. Before starting the *pujā*, he sanctifies all the articles of the *pujā* with *Gangājal* and *Tuḥsi-jal*. Then he keeps one or more heaps of rice (varying according to the number of sacrifices) on the altar.

First of all, he offers *Dharma*, the Supreme Deity the 'first fruit of the year' (green mango) and then some flowers (*Nim* and other flowers), fruits and sweets. After this, offerings are made to *Burāburi* (ancestors) in the same way, and lastly he utters the name of his sib (*gotra*) and offerings are similarly made as before. When the rite of offering is completed, the worshipper revolves the lighted lamp and the incense-burner over the altar thrice by uttering the names of *Dharma*, *Burāburi* and *Gotra* (sib). Thereafter he stands up with the white fowl in his left hand and with some *āruā* rice in his right hand and utters thrice the names of *Dharma*, *Burāburi* and *Gotra* (sib). Then he sits down and feeds the fowl with *āruā* rice, and as soon as the fowl starts taking it he drops a little *āruā* rice from his right hand on its head. This process is repeated thrice after which he beheads the fowl with a knife or scythe. He puts a blood stained feather of the fowl on the heap of rice. The head of the fowl is kept near the heap of rice and the body, a little away from it. After this, he offers *Sārhul mad* thrice to *Dharma*, *Burāburi* and to his *Gotra*.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, the *Pāhān* on reaching the *Sarnā* or sacred grove starts the actual *pujā*. He first of all, drops rice at several spots and sacrifices the fowls offering them to different deities excepting the white one. He now washes his hands, feet and knife etc., and now sacrifices the white fowl which is offered to *Dharmes*. Then he pours a little milk brought by the village *Āhir* over the rice-heaps.

While this is going on, each of the *Orān* females puts a live crab in the burning hearth and hangs up a few more over the hearth. Forecastes are magically obtained regarding the outturn of different pulses in the coming season by means of indications from the burning crabs "as the burning crab crackles in the fire and the other crabs get their legs straightened and stiffened by the heat" (Roy: 1928: 211).

After *pujā*, the *Pāhān* along with his party returns to the house, where the wife of the *Pujār* rubs with oil, the legs of the *Pāhān* and the *Pujār*. The *Pāhān's* wife gives the *Pāhān* and the *Pujār*, each a cup-ful of rice-beer. The *Pāhān* drops a little of it on the *Sarnā sup*. Then the *Pāhān* and the *Pujār* are drenched with water, after which they again go to the *Sarnā*.

In an Orāon family of Sunderban, as soon as the *Tahari* and curry are prepared with the sacrificed animals, a little of these is taken on three leaf plates. The *Ojhā*, first of all, offers one of the leafplates to *Dharma* and the others to *Burāburi* and *Gotra* (sib) respectively. After this, he offers *Sārhuḷmad* which is specially prepared for this festivity, firstly to *Dharma*, then to *Burāburi* and lastly to *Gotra*. Then he pours ordinary water on the altar in their names. When all these are over, he bows to the above deities and the family members also follow suit.

In Chotā-Nāgpur area also, the *Pāhān* takes up a little of *Tahari* and the roasted meat, and offers the same to four spirits, viz. *Darhā*, *Deswāli*, *Chā'ā Pāchcho* and *Chāndī* and salutes them.

After the worship is over, the male members of the family, irrespective of age and belonging to the same *Gotra* (sib) as that of the worshipper, sit round the place of worship after washing their hands and mouth, and *Tahari*, meat-curry and *Sārhuḷmad* are distributed to all of them including himself and his wife, and no one would start eating till the worshipper begins to eat. *Prasad* of *Tahari* etc. is distributed among the Ranchi Orāons also in a similar way.

In flood-ridden area of Sunderban, the Orāon males and females intoxicated with the *hāndiā* (rice-beer), sometimes sing and dance. But this singing and dancing do not follow a set pattern. Sexual laxity is not much prevalent on this occasion in this area.

In Chotā-Nāgpur area, the Orāons of both sexes sing and dance in a more systematic and rhythmic fashion in the village *ākhrā* (dancing ground). Rice-beer continues to be

freely drunk and ribald songs are sung. Regarding the sexual laxity among the people on this occasion, Roy says, "The licentiousness permitted on this occasion is believed to stimulate the fertility of the earth". (1928: 216).

Two other rites are prevalent amongst Ranchi Orāons, but not practised by the Sunderban Orāons. These are *Deochalā* or the election of the bachelors' *Pāhān* and the worship of *Mutri-Chāndi*.

The *Dhāngar-Pāhān* or the bachelors' *Pāhān* is selected by means of magical rite of moving the *lorha* (stone-pounder) by "a young man of nervous or psychic temperament and believed to possess a light *Chhain* (shade)" (Roy: 1928: 216).

Then the *Dhāngar Pāhān* worships *Mutri-Chāndi* by sacrificing a black fowl.

DISTRIBUTION OF NIM BRANCH AND NIM FLOWER (PHUL-KHUSI)

In the afternoon of the day of festivity in Sunderban, the *Ojhā* starts from the village *Thān* (altar) to the house of each of the villagers accompanied by the *Bhakat* and a number of villagers and musicians. The *Bhakat* carries a few *Nim* (*Melia-azadirachta*) branches and *Nim* flowers on a *sup* (winnowing fan). As the *Ojhā* goes to each house, the female folk of that house rub the legs and head of the *Ojhā* with mustard oil and pour a little cold water on his head. Then they give him a cup of liquor. *Bhakat* and other elderly persons of the village are also similarly treated. The *Ojhā* gives the seniormost female member of the house, a few *Nim* flowers, and also inserts a branch of *Nim* into the thatch of the house as an emblem of prosperity. The women bow down before him and also before *Bhakat* and other elderly persons of the village. The *Ojhā* and his party are similarly treated in every household. In the evening, the *Ojhā* lays the remaining branches and flowers of *Nim* on the altar of the village.

At present in some Orāons villages of Sunderban, this distribution of *Nim* flowers and branches is not done by the

priest but the head of each of the household performs it for his own house.

The Orāons of Ranchi district also perform the *phul-khusi* (*Pūnp khērnā*) rite. Here the *Pujār* "arranges the *Sāl* blossoms one by one on an ordinary *sup*, the *sarnāsup* with the sacrificial knife inserted in it having been hung up, as before, inside the *Pāhān's* hut for fear of being desecrated by the touch of the profane". (Roy: 1928: 219). Then the *Pujār* inserts a *Sāl* blossom into the ear of each man and into the hair of each woman present there. Then the *Pāhān* and the *Pujār* are drenched with water. Thereafter, the *Pāhān* takes a *sup* containing *Sāl* flowers, and the *Pujār*, a jar of water, and start visiting every house followed by musicians and other villagers. At the door of each house, the *Pujār* pours a little water from his jar making a circle and also makes another circle of water where the paddy and other wealth are kept, and in this circle the *Pāhān* and the *Pujār* stand. "This is believed to bring luck to the family and increase its wealth". (Roy: 1928: 221). The mistress of the house treats the *Pāhān* and the *Pujār* in the same way as is done in the Sunderban area. "She then holds forward the front part (*anchal*) of her cloth, and on this the *Pāhān* puts some *Sāl* blossoms three times with the joined palms of his hands, and, each time this is done, the woman makes obeisance (*Sālām*) to the *Pāhān* by touching her own forehead with the front part of her cloth with *Sāl* blossoms in it". (Roy: 1928: 221). The *Pujār* then inserts one or two *Sāl* blossoms on the ear of each man and the chignon of each woman of the house. In this way after visiting all the houses, they return to the *Pāhān's* house where they take rice-beer.

The Orāons of Southern Bengal spend the whole day in singing, dancing and merry-making. At night, generally a feast is given by each household to its friends, relatives etc.

In Chotā-Nāgpur, a feast is given to the villagers at the *Pāhān's* house. Next day, the *Sarnā-sup* is installed at *Pāhān's* house (*Supbaithānā*). This marks the end of the *Sārhu* festival of the Orāons.

From the above discussion, it can easily be seen that in some of the household festivals of the Orāons of the Sunderban area deities like *Sitalā*, *Manasā* etc. borrowed from the local Hindus, are propitiated. Some of their traditional festivals like *Karam*, *Sārhul* etc. which are still observed in community level in Chotā-Nāgpur by their kinsmen, have turned into household ones i.e. observed by the individual families in Sunderban tract. Further, most of the original rites of their traditional festivals have undergone a good deal of modifications in both the areas.

B. COMMUNITY FESTIVALS

Household festivals of the Sunderban Orāons have been discussed above. The community festivals that are celebrated at the village level, are now dealt with. In these festivals all villagers, male and female, young and old, participate. These community festivals are celebrated in the village *Thān*, and are generally meant for the common welfare of the village.

The table below gives a list of the main village or community festivals of the Orāons of the Sunderban area :—

TABLE XV

Sl. No.	Name of the Festival	Deity worshipped	Bengali month	English equivalent
1.	<i>Grām Pujā</i> or <i>Grāmbāndhā Festival</i>	All the village deities	(a) <i>Agrāhayan</i> (Stage I) (b) <i>Ā s h ā r</i> (Stage II)	November-December (Stage I) June-July (Stage II)
2.	<i>Tusu Festival</i>	<i>Laksmī</i> (<i>Tusu Pous Thākur</i>)		December-January
3.	<i>Kālī Pujā</i>	<i>Mā Kālī Sitalā Dharma</i>	<i>Māgh</i>	January-February

Out of the above mentioned festivals, the *Kālī Pujā* is not celebrated regularly in some Orāon villages. If any contagious disease invades the village, and if the respectable persons of the village consider the *pujā* to be necessary, then only it

takes place. The cost for these community festivals is borne by the villagers as a whole, who generally subscribe to these in cash and/or in kind. The *Bhakat* or some other elderly person of the village collects subscriptions and procures articles for the festivals. In all these community festivals, the *Pāhān* acts as the priest, and is assisted by the *Bhakat* and other elderly persons.

In this connection, it may be stated here that these community festivals of the Orāons of Sunderban are not the traditional Orāon festivals of Ranchi district but have been borrowed from the neighbouring backward and semi-backward castes and communities of the area. The villagers, generally, do not go out for work during the day of festivity as they consider it to be the day of rejoicing.

In the following pages, descriptions of the important community festivals of the Orāons of the Sunderban area are given :—

1. GRAM PUJA OR GRAM BANDHA FESTIVAL

Grām Pujā or *Grāmbāndhā* festival (sealing of the village) is the most important of the community festivals. In this festival some magical rites are performed in order to seal the village against the evil spirits etc. responsible for disasters, deaths etc. in the village.

The festival is usually performed in two stages—in the first stage the animals or birds to be sacrificed, are offered to the village deities along with the observation of the magical rite of *Grāmbāndhā*, and the sacrifice of the offered animals followed by the observation of *Bheloā-phāri* constitutes the second stage.

The first stage of the festival generally starts on the full-moon day (*Purnimā*) of the month of *Agrāhayan* (Nov.-Dec.), and the second one on the new-moon day (*Amābashyā*) of the month of *Āshār* (June-July) of the next year.

The *Ojhā* or the *Pāhān* of the village generally performs the *pujā* helped by the *Bhakat* and other villagers.

The *pujā Thān* of the village is previously cleaned with

cow-dung paste by the *Bhakat*. On the *pujā* day, all the villagers also clean their respective houses with cow-dung paste, and also clean their persons, clothings etc. in order to celebrate this *pujā*.

The date of the *pujā* is generally selected by the *Ojhā* or the *Pāhān* after a consultation with the elderly persons of the village. Articles required for *pujā* are procured locally by the *Bhakat* from the subscriptions collected from the villagers.

Stage—I. (Festival held during Agrāhāyān—Nov.-Dec.).

Early in the morning of the *pujā* day, the priest after taking and wearing a borderless new *Dhuti* (known as *Thān dhuti*), arranges the following articles round the *Thān* of the village.

Varieties of flowers, five types of pulses (*Kalāi*, *Boot*, *Ghholā*, *Maṭar*, *Mug*), sweets (*Sandesh* and *Bātāsā*), fried rice (*Murki*), fried paddy (*Khai*), *āruā* rice, green coconut, banana, incense-burner, oil lamp, earthen and stone pots, *Gangā-jal*, *Tulsijal*, Mango-leaves, Bel-leaves, Basil leaves, mustard oil, narcotics (hemp, rice-beer etc.), betel and betel-nut (25 each), new white cloth, red napkin, red thread, four cooks—one red, one white, and two of other colours, two chickens—one black and the other brown and Rs. 1.25 as sacrificial fee.

The rice-beer meant for the *pujā*, is specially prepared by the *Bhakat* three days prior to the actual *pujā*.

Early in the morning of the day of *puja* the *Bhakat* and his wife clean the village *Thān* with cow-dung pastes. Then they clean and wash the articles for the *pujā*. They also clean the surroundings of the *Jhākrā* tree of the altar and tie seven loops of the red thread round the *Jhākrā* tree.

The *Ojhā* or the *Pāhān* after arranging the articles, sits down cross-legged by the side of the altar facing east. First of all he sanctifies himself and then all the articles by sprinkling *Gangā-jal* and *Tulsi-jal*, after which he starts worshipping the village deities. At first he invokes the Supreme Deity *Dharma*, then *Mā Kālī*, the Mother Goddess and *Gāon Deoti*, the village deity, and then one by one *Chandi*, *Sialā*, *Laksmi*, *Saraswati*, *Gangā Devi*, *Manasā*, *Mahadeva* and others.

During the worship, he puts vermilion marks on all the earthen balls and cones on the altar (representing different deities of the village) and sprinkles sacred water and flowers on each of these deities uttering their names. Then he revolves the lighted earthen lamp and the incense burner round each of these deities thrice. He next places the offerings on a betel leaf containing a betel nut, some sweets, fruits etc. near each cone and ball representing each of the deities of the village. To each deity he offers one heap of *āruā* rice with the following incantation :—

“Om Sankar, Mahādev,
Iswar, Gouri, Pārbati,
Rakkhā Kālī Bhog Basāle.
Kāmukhyā, Harirjhi Chandi, Bramhār Jhi Sitalā,
Laksmi, Saraswati, Gangā Debi Bhog Basale.

[“Oh, Sankar-Mahādev, Iswar (Dharma), Gouri, Pārbati, Rakshā Kālī. Oh, Kāmukshā Chandi, the daughter of Hari, Sitalā, the daughter of Bramhā, Laksmi, Saraswati, Gangā Devi we are making offerings to you, Please accept [the same].

Then he again worships the deities with flowers and basil leaves dipping these in sacred water of the Ganges. After this he sprinkles *Gangājal* and *Tulsījal* on each fowl, and paints their heads with vermilion. Then he stands up holding the white fowl by the left hand, and some *āruā* rice in the right hand, and utters the name of *Dharma* facing eastward, and calling for the Sun and the Moon as witnesses. He, then, sits down and pours a little *āruā* rice on the ground and feeds the fowl. While it starts taking rice, he drops a few rice from right hand on its head. He again stands up facing east with another fowl (not the black one) in his left hand and utters the name of *Mā Kālī* and *Gāon-Deoti*, then turns to the west via north invoking different other deities. Then he sits down and feeds the fowl in the same way as before. In this way, he offers the remaining fowls to all the deities of the village excepting the black one. During the offering of the fowls, he utters the following *mantras* (incantations) :—

Bār Bār Kon Bār, Nisidin Mangalbār
 Ghar Dhukṭey Man Dhan Kānpe, Kalsā Fāte
 Āere Bāire Ojhā, Mati, Dāin,
 Bisāhi, Lāllā-Gāoā, Churil, Chikil,
 Bāgh, Bāghin, Sāp, Gajār, Dār Haya,
 Kudrā, Bāo, Bātās Dur Kar Dibi
 Iswar, Gouri, Pārbati, Mahādev Bābāke Dohāi.

[I am afraid to enter the room on Tuesday, my heart breaks (in fear). Oh, Ojha, Mati, Dain and others come out and drive away all the evil spirits like, Churil, Chikil, Bisahi, etc., evil air, ferocious animals like tiger, tigress, snakes, etc. by the name of Iswar, Gouri, Pārbati, Mahādeva etc.]

When the *pūjā* is over, all these offered fowls, excepting the black one, are given to an influential person, or the *Ojhā* or the *Bhakat* who keeps these in his own custody in such a way that these are not injured or eaten up by some wild animals, till the time for sacrifice in stage II of the *Grām-bāndhā* festival.

Grām-bāndhā (Sealing of the village) :

Last of all, the black fowl is offered to the Goddess *Kālī* by the priest in a similar way as done before. In the evening, he takes the black fowl and goes to the northern boundary of the village accompanied by some old men and the village drummers who play the drums (*Dhols*), bell-metal plates (*Kānsi*) and horn loudly. On reaching the spot and facing northward, he utters the following *mantras* (incantations) and throws some mustard seeds mixed with earth and *āruā* rice on the ground :—

Sonek Lāngāl Rupek Fāl,
 Bāgh Baldāya Jurlām Hāl;
 Tāite Uṭhlo Kālomāti,
 Tāite Bunlam Sarser Muṭe;
 Sel Barna Sotā, Bel Barna Goṭā
 Tāl Parmān Sarser Gāchh,
 Mān Parmān Pātā.
 Sei Sarse Kuṭlām,
 Sei Sarse Mārlām,

Se Sarse Ke Pare?

Guru Pare!

Gurur Ānggāi Āmi Pari

Ae Sarse Parāa Ki Ki Chhāre?

Dāin Chhāre, Jabani Chhāre,

Marā Chhāre, Māsān Chhāre,

Gun Chhāre, Gunjār Chhāre

Dos Chhāre, Chāmundā Chhāre

Chhār, Māribo Agnibān,

Māriba Sarseri Bān.

Buke Mārlām, Piṭhey Karlām Pār

Kār Ānggāi? .

Kāmuk Kāmukshā

Harijhi Chandir Ānggāi.

[By tilling the soil with a golden plough having a silver plough-share, and putting under the yoke a tiger and a bullock on either side, the black soil is brought out into which I sow the mustard seeds. The mustard plants become as high as palm trees, the leaves of which become as large as those of *arum* (Alocasia). After thrashing the mustard plants, I perform the magical rites with the mustard seeds by my Master's order in the same way as my Master does. By these magical rites, I drive away all the evil persons and spirits such as Dāin, Jabani, Chamunda etc. Oh, you evil persons and spirits get away, otherwise I will throw at you these "charmed mustard seeds" (those will rush toward you like blazing arrows) by the name of Chandi, daughter of Lord Hari".]

After uttering this *mantra* for driving away the evil spirits etc. he starts uttering the following *mantra* for sealing the village against the re-entry thereof :—

Ghar Bāndi, Dor Bāndi

Bāndi Pirār Pāṭ.

Anukoṭi Dākini Bāndi

Diye Lohār Sāt

Bhut, Pret, Doitya, Dāno

Sāp, Bichā, Bang

Manasā, Bāsuki, Bāndi;

Bāndi Bāgher Ṭhāng.
 Chār Pāye Pāye Banda,
 Banda Buker Hāt
 Banda Banda Mahābanda
 Sire Siber Jaṭ.
 Jadi Bando Ṭuṭe,
 Banda Siber Kire Lāge
 Āmāder Dhul Parāte,
 Sarse Parāte Tetris Koṭi
 Debtā Gan Bhāge.
 Chaya Koṭi Dānā
 Banda Nā Karile Lāgābe Hānā.
 Kār Ānggāi?
 Powārer Ānggāi.
 Āmār Bandanā Ṭhik Hoye Thāke.

[I am sealing the houses and the entrances of the village with iron bars (magical spell) against millions of evil spirits, like Bhut, Ghosts, Pret, Dākini etc., ferocious animals like Snake, Tiger etc. These sanctified mustard seeds and dust are so powerful that even thirty three crores of gods and goddesses are afraid of these. I must seal the village by the order of the God, otherwise six crores of evil spirits, evil eyes etc. will haunt the village.]

When the magical incantation is over, the *Ojhā* or the *Pāhān* (priest) releases the black fowl outside the village boundary (sometimes he himself twists away the head of the animal), and plants a bamboo pole and ties with it a piece of new white cloth which hangs like a flag. Then he paints the pole with the paste of vermilion and mustard oil, and marks on it the name of Lord *Hari*. Then the party circles round the whole boundary of the village in an anti-clockwise direction, and the priest scatters the sanctified mustard seeds, *āruā* rice and powdered earth as charmed objects on the way, and plants three other bamboo poles with a piece of new white cloth on each as flags on three other corners of the village. During the procession the musicians all along play musical instruments.

In this way, the priest seals the village in order to protect

the villagers from diseases, deaths etc. from the hands of evil spirits and wild animals.

Then the party returns to the village, and each member drinks liquor. At night a sumptuous feast is given to all. Throughout the whole day, all the villagers irrespective of age and sex enjoy the time.

This marks the end of the Stage I of the *Grām Puṣā* or *Grāmbāndhā* festival.

Stage II (Festival held in the month of Āshār—June-July).

On the new-moon day of the month of *Āshār* (June-July), the second stage of the *Grāmbāndhā* festival starts. The *Bhakat* procures the articles of the *puṣā* which are similar to those used in the Stage-I of the festival. The fowls, which were offered in the last *Agrāhayan* festival, are collected from the persons who maintained them. The *Bhakat* and his wife clean the village *Thān* or altar and also base of the *Jhākrā* tree in the same way as before. He also winds a red thread round the body of the *Jhākrā* tree as on the previous occasion. The *Ojhā* or the *Pāhān* (priest), after taking bath and wearing new clothes, sits for the *puṣā*. Then he puts five handfuls of *āruā* rice on five spots near the tree of *Jhākrāburiā*, situated by the side of the altar. Afterwards, he sanctifies all the articles of the *puṣā* (including himself) by sprinkling sacred *Gangājal*, and starts worshipping the gods and goddesses in the same way as before (during Stage I of the festival).

After offerings are made to the deities, the *Pāhān* stands up holding the white fowl by his left hand facing eastward, and taking some *āruā* rice from the extreme eastern heap under the *Jhākrā* tree; he utters the name of *Dharma* thrice and kneels down and feeds the fowl with *āruā* rice from the heap of rice in the extreme eastern end. As the fowl starts taking *āruā* rice from the heap, he drops a little rice from his right hand on its head and again stands up and utters the name of *Dharma* thrice. After repeating this process three times, he cuts the head of the fowl with a scythe by a single stroke. He takes a little blood of this fowl in an earthen plate and keeps it by the side of that heap of rice on the eastern

side from which the fowl was fed. The head of the fowl is kept by the side of the plate containing blood of the fowl. Then he turns to the western side and sacrifices the remaining four fowls, one after another, in the name of other deities, in the same way as in the case of the first one, uttering the following incantation:—

Bār Bār Kon Bār

Nisidin Mangalbār etc. etc. as in Stage I.

When the sacrifices are over, *Bhakat* takes the heads and the bodies of the sacrificed fowls to his house, where his wife prepares *Tahari* with these sacrificed bodies along with other articles such as *āruā* rice, spices, oil etc.

As soon as the cooking is finished, the *Bhakat* brings a little *Tahari* and a little rice-beer (*hāndiā*) in two brass vessels, and hands over these to the priest. The priest sanctifies these by sprinkling *Gangājal*, and offers a little *Tahari* and *hāndiā* (rice-beer) to the first heap of rice, representing *Dharma*. In the same way, other deities are also offered these on the remaining four heaps of rice. Lastly, he pours ordinary water over these heaps for symbolically washing the mouths of the deities.

When this is over, *Tahari* is distributed as *Prasād* among the villagers irrespective of age and sex. All the villagers bring cooked rice and *hāndiā* from their own houses, and take these along with the *Prasād*.

Throughout the whole day and night, the villagers enjoy vocal and instrumental music, plenty of drinks, and also dance of the village maidens.

On the next day, the *Ojhā* or the priest performs the *Bheloāphāri* festival in the same way as described earlier, and this marks the end of the *Grām Pujā* festival.

Among the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons, there is no festival like *Grām Pujā* or *Grāmbāndhā* festival as described above. This, however, is prevalent among the backward and semi-backward castes and communities, of Sunderban, infested with various dreadful elements, and the immigrant Orāons adopted the same from their neighbours as they too were natu-

rally afraid of all these elements ; as protection at the village level, the ceremony of *Grāmbāndhā* was evolved.

2. TUSU FESTIVAL

Sandhyā Diye Berou, Ṭusu,
Gharer Kulabati Go.
Sandhyā Diye Berou, Ṭusu,
Sandhyā Keno Dāoni Go.

(Perform the religious services of the evening, *Ṭusu*, as you are a virtuous wife of the household. *Ṭusu*, why have you not performed the evening services ? Do the same and then you can go out).

A particular day of the month of *Pous* (December-January) becomes sonorous with the melodious rhythm of songs and dances of the femalefolk of each *Orāon* village in *Sunderban*. With every step of the dance, they sing in chorus :—

Gāi Elo, Bāchhur Elo,
Elo Bhagabati Go.
Sandhyā Diye Berou, Ṭusu,
Gharer Kulabati Go.

(The cows together with their calves have come back to the sheds. The Goddess *Bhagabati* has also arrived. So, *Ṭusu*, perform the religious services of the evening before going out, as you are a virtuous wife of the household).

The malefolk play their musical instruments to the tone of songs and dances of the women, when the *Ṭusu* festival infuses new enthusiasm and zeal among the *Orāons*.

The *Ṭusu* festival is celebrated by a number of castes and communities of West-Bengal, and in this deltaic region of Bengal also, the tribalfolk perform this festival with pomp and grandeur. The *Orāons* of *Sunderban* celebrate this festival on the last date (*Sankrānti*) of the month of *Pous* (December-January) with the propitiation of the Goddess *Laksmi*, when the harvested paddy fills up the grain-golas of each house, and brings the tide of joy to the hearts of these poor people. Among

These Orāons, *Ṭusu* is essentially a festival of the females as is the case with people in some other parts of West Bengal.

The day prior to the *pujā*, recently married daughters come back to their paternal house in order to fill their life to the brim with the ecstasy of joy for being amongst the old known faces particularly in the merthful *Ṭusu* season.

The day before the *pujā*, the womenfolk clean the village *Thān* and plaster the same with cow-dung paste, and prepare cakes (*Pithā*) with rice-flour and molasses. They also collect different articles for *pujā*, such as *āruā* rice, sweets (*Bātāsa*, *Sandesh* etc.), fried rice (*Murki*), wheat bread (*Ruṭi*), flowers, vermilion, incense, incense-burner, *Tulsijaḷ*, fruits etc.

On the day of the *pujā*, after taking bath, they arrange the articles on the *Thān*. Sometimes, an earthen image of the Goddess *Laksmi* is also procured for worship, which is quite similar to the image of *Laksmi* set up the Hindu neighbours. The *Ojhā* or *Pāhān*, after taking bath in the morning and wearing a new or clean cloth, comes to the *Thān* for the worship, and sits there facing east. The femalefolk start singing:—

Tel Dio, Saltā Dio,
Sange Dio Bāti Go.
Sandhyā Diye Berou, Ṭusu,
Gharer Kulabati Go.

(*Ṭusu*, put oil and wick in the lamp and set up the light for the evening, as you are a virtuous wife of the household).

After sanctifying all the articles with sacred *Tulsijaḷ*, the *Ojhā* starts worshipping the Goddess *Ṭusu* (*Laksmi*). To the deity, he offers flowers first and then sweets, each thrice, and revolves the lighted lamp and incense-burner round the deity or the *Thān* thrice. After making obeisance to the deity, he distributes some flowers to the female folk who offer the same to the deity and bow before her, and then starts singing—

Kalā Ruilām Sāri Sāri,
Begun Ruilām Dui Gāri,
Bechhe Bechhe Tul, Ṭusu,
Kāl Jābi Sasur Bāri.

(Banana has been planted in several rows and brinjals in two fields. Select and pick up the good ones *Ṭusu*, as you would be going to your father-in-law's house to-morrow).

After offering the flowers to the deity, they express their desire to the goddess thrice. Thereafter, the *Ojhā* starts distributing the *Prasād* of the worship to each of the women. The women start singing again :—

Sasur Bāri Jābār Samaya

Kiser Kānnā Balo Go.

Sange Dilām Saraswati,

Chār Jan Kāmini Go.

(Do not weep, *Ṭusu*, at the time of starting for your father-in-law's house. *Saraswati* and four female attendants will accompany you).

With this the festival ends.

The striking feature of this festival is the absence of animal sacrifice and offering of rice-beer to the deity as done in connection with other festivals. The image of the deity is not immersed or destroyed, but is kept carefully till the next years' worship.

The Orāon females spend the whole of the day and night singing and dancing. They sing a number of songs describing different activities of *Ṭusu* and also praising different Hindu goddesses. The male folk, well saturated with plenty of rice-beer, keep the link of the tune with instrumental music.

These *Ṭusu* songs, containing the elements of joy and pensiveness, display a key-note expressing a mixed outburst of satiety and discontent. *Ṭusu* is regarded as one of their own people, as daughter, and through songs about her, they try to express the sorrows and joys of their own life and activities.

Their life is hardly one of ease and smooth sailing throughout the year. There are natural calamities, diseases etc. which further disturb and disrupt the harmony of their normal life and activities. Their sorrows echo through these songs :—

Āchil Dilām, Pāchil Dilām,

Darjā Dite Pārlam Nā.

Jhājhari Karāi Jal Chhedālo,

Bhijlo Ṭusur Bichhānā.

(I have fenced the house, made the walls but could not fit the door. Through the damaged roof water has leaked down drenching the bed of *Ṭusu*).

In the storm they search for food, the little children try to fill their bellies with the meagre food available.

Jhar Elo, Jhāptā Elo,
Bhese Elo Āmer Chokā,
Ṭusu Churi Janmer Chhochā.
Kurie Khelo Āmer Chokā.

(The storm came, the rains too. The skin of Mango is floating on the flood water. *Ṭusu* can hardly check her hunger and tries to quench it with the Mango skin).

In spite of all their poverty, they want to survive, they want to keep their existence. The mother always tries to give at least stale-rice in her child's pale, hungry mouth. But *Ṭusu* likes fish, she would not take the stale-rice without fish. It is rainy season, fish is abundant. Then why not the father brings fish for her? How can a father ignore the request of his child? He goes out for buying fishes and brings the same. *Ṭusu* is given fish.

Hāṭe Gelām, Bāzāre Gelām,
Kine Ānlām Ruipona,
Bhālo Kore Kheyo, Ṭusu,
Galāye Jeno Bāde Nā.

[I went to the *Hāṭ* (local market), I went to the Bazar, and purchased a small *Rui* fish. *Ṭusu*, eat the fish carefully so that fish-bones do not get stuck up in your throat].

Thereafter pass the melancholy days. The light of joyful days have sparkled, and *Ṭusu* will go to school for education. Mother has dressed *Ṭusu* and given books to her hand, and *Ṭusu* starts for school.

Ekso Ṭākā, Duiso Ṭākā,
Tinso Ṭākār Bai Hāte,
Āmār Ṭusu Likhte Jābe
Engrāji Kalam Hāte.

[Taking books, costing two hundred or three hundred rupees out an English fountain pen in hand, *Ṭusu* will go (to school) for study].

Ṭusu has now become lazy. She does not want to perform the household work and often goes out with her play-mates. Mother gets angry and thinks of keeping *Ṭusu* without food. But then and there the motherly love awakens in her, and she thinks she cannot afford to punish her beloved one :—

Ore Ore Kālo Chhuri
Khawabo Tor Pāntā Bhāt,
Rānnā Ghare Suāi Rākhbo,
Dhorābo Tor Sānnipāt.
Mājāi Kore Mārbo Lāthi,
Chhārābō Tor Sānnipāt.

(Oh, you dirty girl! Wait, I would not feed you even with stale-rice. I shall keep you confined inside the cooking shed, so that you get a serious disease, and then a good kick would be given to your buttocks, and your disease will disappear).

In her village, every day *Ṭusu* comes in contact with so many people, and they tell little *Ṭusu* the stories of Calcutta, a city of dream and mystery to her.

Kolkātāya Dekhe Elām,
Dāine Bāme Lāl Goru.
Kon Goruṭā Libi, Ṭusu,
Dānth Kālo, Mājā Saru ?

(In Calcutta we saw so many red cows, on left and right. Which one would you like to take *Ṭusu* ? Would you prefer the one with narrow waist and black teeth).

Along with so many beautiful things, Calcutta also possesses strange, dreadful things. Tales of all these take *Ṭusu* to a mysterious fairy land.

Kolkātāya Dekhe Elām,
Mohis Larāi Legechhe.
Dui Dhāre Dui Mundu Kātā,
Rakte Bān Bhesechhe.

(We saw in Calcutta, the buffaloes fighting. Two severed heads are lying, one on either side of the road. And the place is flooded with blood).

Ṭusu is now not a little child, she has grown up. The mystery of human life now charms her more than that of fairy land.

She is now conscious of her beauty and attractiveness. She searches for a new destiny in her life. She hankers for love—

Bārīr Dhāre Phul Gāchhṭā
Phule Jhaṭpaṭ Korlo,
Shes Rāte Kokil Dāke
Ṭusur Monṭā Bhulailo.

[The flowering plant near the house is bending with the heavy loads of flowers (i.e. youth). Towards the later part of night, the cuckoo coos from the tree which has decoyed *Ṭusu's* mind].

Blooming youth overflows in *Ṭusu's* body. This creates headache among the elders. They are searching for a handsome groom for her. *Ṭusu* goes out with her boundless beauty and youth to different houses of the village. The elders warn her :—

Sab Pārāya Jeyo Ṭusu,
Dakṣin Pārāya Jeo Nā
Dakṣin Pārāya Jorā Satin
Pān Dile Kheyo Nā.

(You may go to all the hamelets *Ṭusu*, but avoid going to the southern one, where the people have co-wives. Do not take betel from them even if offered).

The youngsters of the village are in love with *Ṭusu*, and they are very fond of her. The elders again warn *Ṭusu* :—

Āre Āre Kālo Chhuri,
Eto Pirit Bārāle
Swarger Chāndke Hāte Liye
Rāstāye Bose Kāndāle.

(Oh you dirty girl, you have managed to increase their love for you. Getting your lover within your grip, who is as nice

as the heavenly moon, you have made him weep on the street).

Then one day that memorable occasion comes to her life, when she gets married. The years pass. She does not bear child which has kept her in great despair. She now hankers for nothing but a child. The elders now chide her for her unkind behaviour towards little children. They say :—

Chhele Chhele Koris Ṭusu,
Ār Ki Chhele Habe ?
Parer Chhele Dhare Māro,
Chheler Bedon Jāno Nā.

(Ṭusu, you are hankering for a child,
But would you be getting one ?
You always beat others' children
You do not realise the sorrowful plight of a child).

Thus from the above we see that these Ṭusu songs not only glorify the goddess Ṭusu, but depict innumerable features of their life and activities. Because of the fact, that they think Ṭusu to be a naughty little girl of their household, these songs become so lively and so natural. The worship of Ṭusu and the associated songs as sung by the Orāon females are borrowed from the neighbouring Hindu castes, and these are the outcome of the influence of regional environment.

These types of songs are absent among the Ranchi Orāons.

3. KALI PUJA

The worship of Goddess *Kālī* (*Kālī Pujā*), on community level, is not regularly celebrated annually by the Orāons of the Sunderban area. It is done particularly during outbreaks of severe epidemics, which are regarded by them as due to some evil spirits.

In most of the hamlets or village, Goddess *Sitalā* and also *Dharma* are propitiated along with the Goddess *Kālī*, but *Sitalā* is worshipped in the morning hours whereas *Kālī Pujā* is held at night of the same day.

When an epidemic starts in the surrounding area or when it is in its climax in the village, the elderly persons of the

village consult the *Ojhā* for the worship of *Kālī*. Generally, it is arranged in the month of *Māgh* (January-February).

A few days before the actual *pujā*, the *Bhakat* starts collecting various articles needed for the festivity. He also sometimes collects cash subscriptions from the villagers in order to purchase those articles which could not be procured from the villagers.

The following articles are generally required for the festivity :— different types of flowers of which *Jābā* (China rose) must be one, various fruits, sweets, betel-leaf, betel-nut, vermillion, incense, incense-burner, *Belpātā*, rice-beer, mustard oil, *Tulsijal*, *Gangājal*, green coconut, five pulses (*Kalāi*, *Boot*, *Chholā*, *Mug*, *Matar*), different narcotics such as hemp etc., lighted lamp, mango leaves, a piece of new white cloth (known as *Chāndoā*) used for covering the *Thān*, a new white *sārī* with red border (for Goddess *Kālī*), two red napkins (*Lāl-Gāmhā*), one *dhuti* for *Mahādeva*, *āruā* rice, a black he-goat, knife etc.

The day before the festivity, the *Bhakat* cleanse the village *Thān* with cow-dung and earth paste, and on the *pujā* day, after taking bath, he plants four poles on four corners of the *Thān* over which he places the piece of white cloth (which acts as an upper covering of the *Thān*) known as *Chāndoā*. He then, washes the articles of the *pujā* and arranges the same near the *Thān*. The *Ojhā*, the *Bhakat* and the young boys of the village observe fast throughout the day till the *pujā* is over.

Early in the morning of the festival day, the *Ojhā*, accompanied by the young boys of the village, goes to a nearby pond or canal for bath. The young boys take with them some drums (*Dhol*), bell metal plate, (*Kānsi*) and horn which they play along the way. First of all, the *Ojhā* takes bath and then the others follow. The *Ojhā* generally puts on a new *dhuti*. After bath, all of them return to the *Thān*, where the *Ojhā* worships *Sitalā* and *Dharma* in the morning and *Kālī* at night.

The *Ojhā* sits near the *Thān* facing eastward and sanctifies all the articles with *Gangājal* and *Tulsijal*. Then he offers different articles first to *Dharma*, and then to the Goddess

Śitalā thrice. When the offering is over he revolves the lighted earthen lamp and the incense-burner round the *Thān* thrice, and bows before the deities. The young boys also make obeisance by uttering the names of these deities. When the *pujā* is over, the worshipper gives a little *Prasād* to each of the boys present.

After the worship, the *Bhakat* and a few boys keep watchful eyes over the *Thān* and the articles used in the worship so that these are not touched by any human beings or animals or birds till the *Kālī Pujā* to be held at night.

After night-fall, the *Ojhā* again comes to the *Thān* and sits by the side of it facing south, and checks up the articles. He sanctifies all these articles again by sprinkling *Gangājal*. Thereafter, he starts worshipping the Goddess *Kālī* by uttering her different names along with incantations, and puts a heap of *āruā* rice on the *Thān*. First of all he offers flowers, fruits, sweets etc. to the Goddess *Kālī*, and places these on the rice-heap. Then he revolves the lighted lamp and the incense burner round the altar by the name of *Kālī*. After this, he puts some vermilion marks on the altar and also on the head of the black he-goat and on the sacrificial knife too. Then he stands up holding the goat in his left hand and some *āruā* rice in his right hand, and utters the name of Goddess *Kālī*. Thereafter, he sits down and feeds the goat with *āruā* rice, and drops on its head some *āruā* rice from his hand thrice uttering incantations.

As soon as it is finished, he cuts the head of the goat with a single stroke with the *Katān* (knife), and keeps the head of the goat by the side of the heap of *āruā* rice and the body, a little away. All along the *pujā* the drummers play on their musical instruments and the womenfolk blow conch-shells and utter *ulu ulu* sounds.

After this, the *Ojhā* orders the boys to flay the body and head of the goat, and cut these into pieces. When the dressing is over, he gives these to the *Bhakat* for preparing *Tahari* with the head of the goat and *āruā* rice, and curry with the body of the goat and some vegetables. These are prepared by the *Bhakat* in a nearby field. The *Tahari* is strictly meant for the

young boys but the curry is for all, irrespective of age and sex.

As soon as the *Tahari* and curry are ready, the *Ojhā* offers these thrice to the deity uttering incantations. He also offers a little *hāndiā* (rice beer) to the deity. Last of all, ordinary water is given for symbolic washing of the mouth of the deity. Then he bows before *Kālī* and makes obeisance, and the villagers follow him.

When the *Kālī Pujā* is over, the villagers enjoy a feast with cooked rice and *hāndiā* etc., brought over by each from his house. First of all, *Tahari* is served only to the young boys, and then curry is distributed to all. Before serving *Tahari* and curry, the *Ojhā* gives all the assembled guests *Prasād* of the *Kālī Pujā*.

After the feast, the villagers, mainly the young folk, spend the rest of the night with instrumental and vocal music.

Next morning the *Ojhā* performs the *Bheloā-phāri* ceremony, and with this the *Kālī Pujā* of the Orāons of Sunderban comes to an end.

Goddess *Kālī* is neither worshipped on community level nor on individual household level by the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur excepting a few exponents of magical rites known as *Mātis*, who worship *Kālī Māi* as a tutelary deity.

On the day of the Hindu festival *Rath-Jātrā* in the month of *Āshār* (June) or within a day or two of it, the *Māṭi* makes a mud-altar known as *Pāt* in his house and installs an iron trident symbolizing *Kālī Māi*. After properly installing, the *Māṭi* starts worshipping her by sacrificing a red fowl and a black goat with a libation of rice-beer. This *Kālī Māi* is again worshipped on the ninth day after *Sohorāi amāwās* i.e. new-moon day of the month of *Kārtik* (November), when the *Māṭi* propitiates her with the sacrifice of a black goat, and pours its blood on the *Pāt* or altar. Thereafter the *Māṭi* or his chief disciple *Pātchela*, takes up a little mud of the altar, a new earthen plate containing burning incense and a cup of rice-beer, and throws these outside the village boundary. After this, *Tahari* is prepared and taken by the *Māṭi* and his disciples.

The different Hindu castes around the Orāons of Sunderban tract worship *Kālī* both on individual as well as on com-

munity levels. *Rakshā Kālī* is worshipped along with *Olā Kālī* during the outbreak of Cholera and along with *Basanta Kālī* during Small Pox.

In all these cases of worship, a Brahmin priest is engaged for propitiating the deities with various types of offerings—fruits, flowers etc. and sacrifice of a black goat.

From the above, it is seen that unlike the Ranchi Orāons (where *Kālī* worship is restricted only to a few specialists), the worship of *Kālī* is more freely celebrated by the Sunderban Orāons on individual as well as on community levels just like the local Hindu castes of the area from whom *Kālī* worship has evidently been borrowed by the immigrant Orāons.

SOME MAGICAL RITES

The Orāons are traditional believers in the efficacy of magic and magical rites and consider that everything that is harmful to man, is due to the activities of certain evil spirits or effects of evil eyes etc. "In magic, the attitude of the Orāons is mainly one of defiance of and control and domination over impersonal mysterious powers, and the result intended is the expulsion of evil or compulsion of natural or supernatural forces and powers in the production of desired favourable conditions or result such as good weather or rain" (Roy: 1928: 3). Orāon magic is concerned primarily with the mysterious impersonal forces and powers residing mostly in natural or artificial objects, and the instruments employed in dealing with them are principally charms and spells, adjurations and incantations as also certain traditional observances and taboos. They believe that the diseases, unnatural deaths (such as death due to Cholera, Small Pox, drowning, fall from tree, thunder and lightning etc), ill-health, destruction of domestic animals and crops etc. are the results of the activities of the evil spirits or due to the action of some witches, wizards, sorcerers etc. who by performing some magical rites bring about the above damages. The human beings, on the other hand, perform some magical rites with the help of *Mati* and *Gunin* (medicine man) which serve as prophylactic measures, and help in driving away the evil spirits responsible, and

curing the same. Two types of magical rites can be observed among the Orāons (among whom magic is ordinarily the business of the specialists): (i) where the magic specialist (medicine man) or priest etc. tries to undo the damages caused by the later type of magical rites, (ii) where he (witch, sorcerer etc) tries to cause harm to others for fulfilling his or his client's objective.

"The Orāon makes a clear distinction between beneficent or public magic and maleficent or private magic. In the practice of maleficent or 'Black' Magic, the aid of some familiar spirit is usually availed of to harm men or cattle. Such magicians as well as witches are feared, despised, shunned and when detected, persecuted and punished..." (Roy: 1928: 11-12).

There is another type of magic amongst them for detecting their future, the presence of spirit and soul etc.

(A) BENEFICIAL MAGICAL RITES:

Among the Orāons of Sunderban all the above-mentioned types of magical rites are prevalent to some degree. A few examples of the *benevolent* type of magical rites are given below:—

(a) *Treatment of Disease*

When a man suffers from a disease, he is generally treated by the village medicineman, the *Māti* or *Gunin*. In a very few cases a doctor (medical practitioner) is also called in now-a-days. The scarcity of modern medical facilities, the poor pecuniary condition and orthodoxy to some extent are responsible for the majority of them depending mostly on their traditional magical means.

When a *Mati* or *Gunin* comes to treat the patient, he first of all observes the patient carefully, feels his pulse and examines his eyes carefully. On an examination, he finds out why and how the man has fallen ill and the spirit responsible for the same. When the diagnosis is made, he starts performing the treatment by means of some magical rites. He asks

the senior-most male member of the family to give him two chickens (*Kātul*), one black and the other red for *Chālparā* (which is a magical means of driving away the evil spirit or spirits responsible for the disease). He then ties an amulet on the left upper arm of the sick person, and sanctifies and charges with charms the *āruā* rice and the mustard seeds by the name of his *Guru* (Master) with magic spells. Thereafter, he starts performing *Chālparā* rite which also is known among some people of Sunderban, as *Kālisādhanā*. First of all, he takes some mustard seeds within a new earthen cup and some *āruā* rice in another one, and after taking a few mustard seeds in his right hand, uttering magical formulae, he throws these thrice on the body of the patient. Then he takes up the container of *āruā* rice and touches the patient's body with the same. Thereafter, holding the black chicken (*Kāla Kātul*) in his left hand and taking some *āruā* rice from the container in his right hand, he goes outside the village boundary in the eastern direction and feeds the black chicken with the *āruā* rice.

While feeding the chicken with the charmed *āruā* rice, he utters the name of *Kālī* with incantations, and after beheading the chicken, he throws it outside the village boundary. The belief behind the whole procedure of this type of treatment, is that by throwing the sanctified mustard seeds on the body of the patient, the *Matī* drives away from the patient's body the evil spirit responsible, which then takes shelter within the *āruā* rice brought in contact with the patient's body by the *Matī*, and the same spirit enters the chicken when fed with the charmed rice. By cutting and throwing away the chicken out of the village boundary, he (i.e. *Matī*) drives away the evil spirit from the village.

On returning to the patient's house, the *Matī* takes another handful of rice and the red chicken (*Lāl Kātul*), and sacrifices the same to the Goddess *Kālī* and *Burāburi* with proper incantations. After sacrifice, he asks some of the family members to bake the head of the chicken on fire. The family members after baking, give it to the *Matī*, who goes to the patient's room alone and offers this to the above men-

tioned deities. In this way the *Matī* or the *Gunin* of the Orāon society of Sunderban treats persons suffering from diseases. The body of the chicken sacrificed to the Goddess *Kālī*, is given to the *Gunin* and he is also paid in cash and kind for his job.

Another indigenous method, applied by the Orāons of Southern Bengal for curing the diseases, is known as *Jhār Phuk*. In this process, the *Matī* or *Gunin* first of all tries to detect the factors responsables for the disease by keenly observing the patient, feeling his pulse-beat, examining the eyes of the patient, tracing out the sign of the presence of spirit in the room etc. After the preliminary scrutiny, he utters some magical formulae and also the name of his master or *Guru*. Then he begins to blow out air from his month directing the same on the body of the patient from head to foot. Thereafter, he takes in an earthen cup, some *āruā* rice, mustard seeds and a little earth from the oven, and charges these with charms by the name of his *Guru*, and throws a little of these thrice on the body of the patient. This is done in order to drive away the spirit responsible for the disease of the man. Taking a little quantity of these, he ties in a piece of new cloth and the same is tied round the neck of the patient as an amulet with the belief that this could protect the man from a fresh attack of the evil spirit. No sacrifice is usually associated with this type of treatment. The *Gunin* is given some remuneration for his service in cash or in kind.

Besides the above-mentioned processes of treatment, there are also various other magical processes such as *Telparā* (magical rite with mustard oil), *Dhulaparā* (magical rite with dust) etc. by which the village priest (*Ojhā*) or the village medicine man (*Gunin/Matī*) is believed to cure diseases.

Almost similar types of treatment for diseases are prevalent among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, but the processes are not known as *Kalisāadhanā* or *Sarseparā* or *Chālpārā* etc. as done in Sunderban, still the methods applied in both the areas are almost identical.

In alluvial plain of Sunderban, among some backward and

semibackward communities *Jhār-Phuk*, *Sarseparā*, *Chālparā* etc. are practised for curing certain diseases.

At present the Orāons and the other backward and semi-backward castes and communities of both the areas are gradually developing knacks for modern medical treatment and are understanding the value and efficacy thereof, and at the same time losing faith on the values of treatment by their traditional magical means.

(b) *Magical Rites in Unnatural Deaths.*

In case of an unnatural death i.e. death from drowning or thunder and lightening or diseases like Cholera, Small-Pox etc., the dead body is not touched by the ordinary people. The *Gunin* or the *Pāhān* is called in, who first of all watches the dead body keenly and tries to detect the cause. Afterwards, he selects a few brave men and sanctifies them by throwing over them charmed mustard seeds, rice and some powdered earth of oven in the name of *Kālī* and his *Guru*, uttering some magical spells. He sometimes ties these articles to the bodies of these brave men with the help of pieces of cloth which serve as amulets. After being thus protected, these people are allowed to touch the dead body and perform funeral rites. It is believed that if they do not perform these rites, the spirit responsible for the death, will diffuse into their body and cause harm. When the funeral is over, these charmed articles are again thrown over them as done earlier.

(c) *Magical Rites against 'Evil' Eye etc.*

The Orāons of Sunderban are always afraid of various evil eyes, evil touches, evil spirits etc. and believe that all these can do harm to their family members, domestic animals, and also can destroy their houses and cause devastation of their crops. In order to be protected against these, they perform some magical rites. A bamboo pole is planted in the middle or in one corner of the field keeping an earthen vessel on the top of the pole. The outer surface of the vessel is marked with some black and white circular figures. Sometimes, instead of an earthen vessel, a skull of an animal is placed on the pole. They also keep similar type of earthen vessel on

the roof of the house. They believe that these protect the field and the house from the action of evil eyes, evil touches, evil spirits etc. The earthen vessel or the skull in the field also scare away birds, beasts and other animals from damaging the crops.

Besides the above-mentioned magical means, these people also adopt various other precautions against evil influences. These have been described earlier in connection with *Grām-bāh dhā* or *Grām Pujā* and also in case of unnatural deaths.

The Orāons of Ranchi district as also the backward and semi-backward castes and communities of the Sunderban area perform various magical rites for protecting themselves and their domestic animals, crops etc. from the hands of evil spirits, evil eyes etc. who are always on the look out for opportunities to do harm to these people.

(B) MALEFICENT MAGICAL RITES

In the foregoing pages discussion has been made about the beneficial magical rites performed by spirit doctors for driving away the evil spirits responsible for diseases etc. It is now proposed to discuss about the malificent magical rites by which a person can produce harmful effects on others. Among the Orāons of Sunderban, the *Māti* or the *Gunin*, besides his magical practices, can also undertake magical rite capable of producing harm to his or his client's enemy. More often these Sunderban Orāons, like their kinsmen of Ranchi district, believe that diseases, unnatural or untimely deaths etc. are caused to the presence in the body of a malevolent spirit or may be due to the effect of 'evil eye,' 'evil touch' etc. They also believe that all the evil effects are due to intrusion of the evil spirit, and these are often invoked by the *Dāins* (witches). Clements⁵⁷ is of opinion that the spirit intrusion is probably considerably later than disease-object intrusion and had undergone considerable diffusion before the full Neolithic period of Western Asia. He further says, "the criterion is the actual presence in the body of a tangible, supposedly pathogenic substance. Now although the exact nature of this substance varies considerably, such

variation is quite haphazard. That is to say, there is no regional differentiation, the most common intruders being small pebbles, bits of leather, sticks, little bones, hairs, coagulated blood, insects, and even small animals".⁵³

In the Sunderban area witches, wizards, sorcerers etc. are considered to be the most dangerous human agencies who by their magical power, can cause intrusion of evil thing into the human beings to do harm.

(i) *Ḍāin*—*Ḍāin*, in the version of the Sunderban Orāons, is a female black magician who either derives the 'evil power' from some familiar spirits and from magical spells and magical objects or are born with the evil eye and evil mouth which disseminate magic poison (*biṣ*) and injuriously affect what ever is directed against by her. The typical notion of a *Ḍāin* is that she is an old woman with white matted hair and stooping posture with a stick in hand. The *Ḍāin* always has control over magic spells, and desires help from some evil spirit whom she incites with the offering of human or other animal blood.

The Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons also have similar types of notions about *Ḍāins*. In this connection Roy says, "The *Ḍāins* (witches) and *Bisāhās* (wizards), who are the human embodiments, so to say, of the 'evil eye' and 'evil mouth' though they cause harm to their enemies by their own 'evil eye' and 'evil mouth' or with the help of some familiar spirit (*Ḍāin kūrī Bhūt*), cannot counteract similar harm caused by or at the instance of another witch or sorcerer". (1928 : 257).

Sometimes the *Ḍāins* undergo a systematic training for acquiring or developing this occult power. But at present, *Ḍāin-ship* is almost absent in the Sunderban area. Sometimes, a few cases about the same may be heard of after a long gap, and the training which was believed to be undergone by the witches is non-existent now.

Regarding the training of the witches in Chotā Nāgpur, Roy says, "witches in general have to acquire their art by a course of training in secret. At dead of night, especially in new-moon nights, the witches of several neighbouring villages assemble under some tree at a secluded spot at some distance from human habitation". (1928 : 257). There they put off

their clothings and hang an old broom round their waist and carry on witches' dance, the trainees learn the spells and incantations and other techniques of the magic art.

Though sorcery or *Ḍāinism* is believed to be losing hold over the Sunderban Orāons, still the following mechanisms are believed to be adopted by some sorcerers, witches etc for causing harm to others (i) by uttering and transmitting magical spell over the hair, nail or a piece of cloth of the intended victim (ii) by shooting theoretical arrow (*Bān-māra*) and *Nishi-dākā*. It is believed that the *Ḍāin* makes a clay model or a picture of the person to whom damage is to be caused, and magic-arrows (*bān*) are shot against it. It is believed that as the magical rite proceeds, the man concerned will feel uneasy and ultimately vomit blood and die. *Nishi dākā*, which is another well-known magical practice for doing harm to others, is caused by the *Ḍāin* or her client. At dead of night or on an inauspicious day (generally Saturday and Tuesday nights are considered to be inauspicious by the Orāons of Sunderban), the *Ḍāin* or her client takes a green coconut with its mouth cut. She calls the man by his name thrice in front of his house. If the man gives answers, the *Ḍāin* at once closes the mouth of the coconut. It is believed that the soul of the man has entered inside the coconut, and after a short while the man would fall sick and die ultimately. Sometimes the *Mati* or the *Gunin* also is seen to perform this *Nishi-dākā* magical rite. The Orāons of Sunderban area also believe that some of these black or maleficent magicians possess this power to such an extent that they can kill any person or animal they like by their magical formula, and if they wish they can even make a person stand still at a particular place and can cause any harm they like. Sometimes death due to drowning, falling from high place, sudden death which apparently has no cause etc. are suspected to be the acts of these magicians. In the same way, still birth, death due to eclampsia, infant death etc. are also sometimes believed to be caused by magical rites.

This type of belief in the capability of doing harm to victims, is also shared by the backward and semi-backward castes and communities of the Sunderban area.

Regarding the *modus operandi* of the witches in Chotā Nāgpur area, Roy has described various methods which bring diseases, deaths and other calamities to human beings and his environments. These methods are (i) the use of the spirit bundle or *sāns*, also called *nāsan*, (ii) the employment of the magic *bān* or arrow-shot (iii) the magical extraction of the intended victim's heart and (iv) 'overshadowing' or otherwise harming an intended victim in the guise of a black cat or *choredewa* or of a manikin. The present-day Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur also believe in witches, wizards and others and in their activities, but due to the effects of modernisation, the fear of the same has greatly been reduced.

ORĀON CONCEPT OF THE SOUL, LIFE AFTER DEATH AND MORALITY

(I) CONCEPTION OF THE SOUL

The Orāons of Sunderban have retained to some extent their traditional notion regarding the conception of the soul, though this has undergone a fair degree of modifications due to contact with the neighbouring populace. The conception of the soul among these people is not so clear-cut and precise. The priests, medicinemen etc. and a few elderly persons can give some idea regarding the soul. The soul according to them is an airy substance, impalpable, untouchable and having any form, shape or colour. It is regarded as the source of all activities of a living body and cannot be burnt, destroyed etc. by any means. The soul can leave the body, at its will, temporarily or permanently. When a man falls asleep or becomes unconscious, the soul leaves the body temporarily whereas at death it leaves the body permanently. The body ceases to act when the soul leaves the body permanently. Sometimes the soul is forced to leave a healthy body as in cases of accidental deaths, snake bites, and acute serious infectious diseases etc. and under such circumstances, the soul may turn into an evil spirit. The souls of the dead relatives may appear in dreams and advise and warn them against some impending dangers, and even suggest remedies.

thereof. For sometime after death, the soul hangs around the burial or cremation ground, or sometimes moves in air in and around the village, then goes to the Supreme God (*Dharma*) for getting the judgement for his deeds on the earth. The good soul gets the mercy of the God and goes to live in heaven (*Swarga*), whereas the evil soul suffers for its misdeeds in the hell (*Narak*).

During funeral ceremony, the Orāons of Sunderban observe certain rites which indicate their notions about the soul. Some coins are left inside the grave with the belief that this would be utilised by the soul for purchasing food. The magical rite performed by them to test whether the soul has come back home or not after burial, also indicates the trend of their conception. The custom of offering food and drink to the soul of dead is another index about their conception of the soul.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur can hardly distinguish between soul and life. "The soul (*jiā*) is identified with the vital principle and is believed to resemble a shadow (*chhāi*) but to be lighter and more intangible. This shade or spirit finally goes underneath the earth when the bones are relegated to the *Kūṇḍi*." (Roy : 1928 : 187). In connection with the Orāon conception of soul and its activities after death, Dehon⁵⁹ says, "a dead man has two shades, the heavy one that goes to *markhā* or the heaven of the Orāons, and the other one that remains among them". Objecting to Dehon's remarks, Roy opines that the Orāons have no notion about double or two souls. He says, "When an Orāon speaks of a 'heavy shade' or *oththā ekh* and a 'light shade' or *neppā ekh*, all that he really means is that some living men—those with 'light shade'—are more susceptible to the supersensual influences, to dreams and visions of supernatural objects and beings, than those with heavy shade. These expressions do not appear to have any particular reference to the 'shades' of the *dead* persons", (1928 : 36). He further states that though the word *merkhā* (not *Markhā* of Dehon) means in Orāon language the sky, they have no notion of a heaven or a hell in theological sense. "This blessed abode of the souls of the duly cremated dead is not in 'heaven' or the sky but *under the earth*" (Roy : 1928 : 34).

Like the Orāons of Sunderban, various rites associated with the death ceremony of the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur, signify the nature of their belief about the soul. The coins, food, tooth-brush etc. given during funeral ceremony, are meant for the use of the soul after death. During *Ekh-mānkhnā* ceremony, the soul is brought back to his former house to remain temporarily only as long as it is not given accomodation in *Pāch-ba'lār*. It is believed that on *Kohā-benjā* (Great marriage) or *Hārborā* (bone-drowning) day, the soul of a deceased Orāon enters into the community of the *Pāch ba'lār* or ancestor-spiriis

The Orāons of the Sunderban area do not believe in the existence of double soul but they believe in temporary shelter of the soul or spirit of the dead like the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons, still the idea of heaven (*Swarga*) and hell (*Narak*) has been imbibed by them from the local Hindus.

At present among the Orāons of both the areas, the conception of the soul has undergone a good deal of modifications and changes due to contact and migration, and also due to the influences of Hinduism and Christianity (in Chotā-Nāgpur) and Hinduism alone (in Southern Bengal).

(II) LIFE AFTER DEATH:

The concept of other world i.e. of heaven and hell is not very clear among the Sunderban Orāons. They simply believe that after death the soul of a person goes to the heaven or hell according to the nature of acts done in this world. They believe that the heaven is a place full of beauty and happiness, and is situated high up in the sky. Those who lead a pious life and commit no wrong, go to the heaven and enjoy peace and heavenly bliss under the mercy of God, the Almighty, whereas the evil doers after death have got to go to hell which is a dangerous place full of miseries, pains and anxieties, and situated much below the earth, full of fire and smoke. According to Roy the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur have no such conception as heaven in the sky and hell down below the earth. He further says that after death, though the soul sometimes takes temporary shelter in his own house, it ultimately goes to the

community of *Pāch-ba'lār* or the ancestral spirit, which is believed to be under the earth (*khekkhel kiā rādar*) near the *kūṇḍā* where it is believed to reside like those of the living.

The present-day non-Christian Orāons of Ranchi district have also developed similar types of conception regarding *Swarga* and *Narak* as that of the Orāons of Sunderban, and this conception has evidently been borrowed from the local Hindus of the respective areas.

(III) MORALITY

The standard of morality regarding what is good and what is bad in human conduct, is generally determined among the Orāons to a great extent by the custom and tradition of the society. That standard, though mainly sub-conscious in origin, is known to have been materially influenced from time to time by individual Orāon elders of exceptional intelligence and forceful character, and, much less frequently in the past and more often at the present day, by younger Orāons of intelligence, character and zeal for social or religious reform who have come in close contact with a higher culture, either Hindu or Christian or both.

With the march of time, the moral code of the Orāons of both areas i.e. of Sunderban as also of Chotā Nāgpur has undergone some modifications and changes. Previously the Orāons had a strong belief that a man used to get reward or punishment for all his activities during his life-time and not in the other world after death. But due to the influences of different puritanistic religious conceptions, they now believe, on the top of their traditional conception that, if a man does not get the full results of his good deeds during his life-time, it would come unto him in the next world. They also believe that a man must get punishment for his misdeeds during the life-time, and if he does not get the whole of it in this earth, he would have to undergo the remaining punishment in the hell after death. They also believe that everything a man does or thinks in this world is noticed by the Supreme Deity, *Dharma* or *Dharmes* as he is regarded as the guardian of morality and

punishes every human being with sickness, death or in such other ways for breaking the customary rules of morality.

The Orāons of Sunderban as also of Ranchi believe that good behaviour, and simple religious life make their way to heaven easier. Some of the acts such as faith towards religion, observances of the rules and regulations of the society, devotion to parents, respect for superiors, telling the truth, leading sincere and faultless life etc. are considered by them as good work for which a man gets reward from the Supreme Deity. The opposite are regarded as bad work for which a person gets punishment.

Thus, it is seen from the above that amongst the advanced section of the Orāons, some degree of world consciousness has developed with the formation of the idea of the essential rightness of things, which is somewhat different from what existed in the traditional Orāon society which "has not risen from tribal consciousness to a world-consciousness, his concept of rightness is not concerned with the essential rightness of things". (Roy : 1928 : 14). This is mainly due to the influences of different puritanistic forces around them.

CHAPTER: IX

INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONSHIP

The Sunderban area is at present, inhabited by a number of ethnic groups belonging to different Hindu castes (such as Bāgdi, Māhishya, Turi, Ghāsi, Māhāto, Bairāgi, Nāpit, Bāuri, Pod etc.). Tribal communities (such as Orāon, Mundā, Bhumij, etc.) and Muhammadans, also live side by side having close neighbourly relations with the Hindus. Though these communities vary greatly in their social status, still there exists a good deal of socio-economic interdependence in between them which has fostered a free exchange of customs and ideas between different communities. The following pages deal with the effects of their interactions and interdependance on the immigrant Orāons in different spheres of activities. This will show how these immigrant Orāons of Sunderban have acclimatized and adjusted themselves to the local environment.

(A) ECONOMIC SPHERE :

In the economic sphere, all the castes and communities of Sunderban are more or less interdependant but the dependency of the tribal people of this area upon the local people, both Hindus and Muslims, is quite marked.

The Orāons work as agricultural labourers in the fields of the caste Hindus, Muhammadans and even the richer section

of the tribal group, and also, sometimes work as share-croppers with them. They are also employed as day labourers in different economic pursuits (such as brickfield work, building of houses and other construction works etc). under the non-tribal communities, but a great majority of local people, both Hindus and Muslims would not like to work in the fields of the Orāons or Mundās (even with better economic conditions) as agricultural labourers or day labourers, though they would gladly accept such jobs under people of their own communities. It is frequently seen that the son of a poor Orāon is working in the house of a rich Orāon or of a Hindu caste or of a Muslim as a servant (*Māhindar*,) but the reverse can hardly be found. Besides these, the Orāons take loan from the influential Hindu castes or from Muhammadans during their agricultural operations or for any social ceremony such as marriage etc. or construction of a new hut and/or on occasions of failure of crops etc., but in rare cases a Hindu or a Muhammadan is seen to take loans from these tribal people. This is mainly due to the fact that the local people even in times of need would not approach a comparatively rich tribal person for loan or any other favour out of prejudice.

The Orāons of Sunderban have quite significant and direct economic relation with the artisan groups of the region. They purchase the artifices of their daily necessities from these artisan groups, e.g. they purchase the earthen household utensils from the potters (*Kumār*) baskets, fish-traps etc. from basket-makers (*Dom* or *Māhālī*) etc. They also solely depend on the blacksmiths (*Kāmār*) for ploughshares and other agricultural implements and also some household cutting implements etc.

These three castes-potter, basket-maker and blacksmith play vital roles in the economic life of the Orāons of the Sunderban area.

The potter supplies them with water vessels, cooking pots, different types of pots and plates used in different *pujās* and festivals, earthen lamps etc. The basket-maker helps them by supplying various types of baskets such as *dhāmā*, *dālā* etc. for agricultural and household purposes; winnowing fan (*kulā* or

sup) for household and religious purposes, and various fishing traps etc. the blacksmith helps them by supplying new ploughshare, sickle, hoe, spade and other agricultural implements as also supplying cutter, knife etc. for household and other purposes. Due to the absence of sufficient number of weavers (*Tānti*) in the nearby areas, and due to the influx of cheap mill-made clothings, the bond between the Orāons and this caste (*Tānti*) is almost non-existent.

The Orāons purchase these articles either in cash and/or in kind from these different above-mentioned castes, and pay the same at the time of purchase or after a certain period (a month or so) or after harvesting. It is often seen that the people belonging to different castes, come to the Orāon villages to sell various commodities in exchange of money or paddy or rice, and also for purchasing from them different foodstuff and kitchen, garden products often at cash price. However, now-a-days, the weekly or bi-weekly market plays a dominant role in this respect. Many of the *hāts* (local markets) of this area sit twice a week, and a few even daily. In these markets majority of the sellers of consumer goods belong to different local castes and communities (Hindus and Muslims), whereas the agricultural and kitchen garden products are mostly sold by the poorer people of the locality and also by the tribals.

From these local markets the Orāons procure from people of different ethnic groups, articles like salt, spices, rice, paddy, *āttā* (flour), mustard oil, vegetables, seeds, sweets, suger, kerosine oil, *bibi* (country made cigaretters), cloths, earthen vessels, bamboo baskets, iron implements, brass utensils etc. Besides the above-mentioned articles, they also sometimes purchase fish, meat, fancy goods, cheap luxury goods such as ornaments of glass, plastic or metals, shoes and sandals, cheap cosmetics etc. Live-stock and fowl are generally purchased either from special market for the same or from the houses of individuals belonging to different castes etc.

On the other hand, the Orāons mainly sell, in these markets, country liquor, fish, egg, vegetable, paddy, rice, etc.

These local markets not only serve as places for business transactions but also help in establishing free contact, fami-

liarity and friendship with each other, and also in the exchange of ideas of social and other activities of life.

It is these markets that provide these Orāons, facilities for economic transactions as also for establishing personal and social interactions with different castes and communities. They not only come in contact here with the non-relatives but also meet their agnates, affinals and friends of other villages, and exchange information and ideas regarding personal and family affairs. They frequently aggregate in the tea stalls of the market and discuss about their weals and woes of life, and sometimes matters of common interest of the region. These interactions indirectly bring them closer and closer, and help in building up a close friendly circle.

These are a few important economic channels which have helped in establishing good relationship between the Orāons and their non-Orāon neighbours, and these have helped to a considerable extent in removing the misunderstandings or prejudices and widened the scope of mutual understanding through mutual dependence.

(B) SOCIAL SPHERE :

In the sphere of social activities, the Sunderban Orāons have liberally borrowed a good deal of traits from the neighbouring communities of which the influence of Hindu ideology has been much more prominent than others.

The *Sasthi Pujā* ceremony celebrated for the welfare of the new-born on the sixth day after birth is a pure Hindu custom adopted by the immigrant Orāons. The *Mukhe Bhāt* (the first rice-giving to a child) ceremony, now-a-days practised by the Sunderban Orāons, also is evidently an imitation of the *Annaprāsan* ceremony of the neighbouring Hindus. In giving names to the children, the present-day Orāons are freely using modern Bengalee Hindu names.

In marriage, these people have borrowed a number of traits from Hindu castes, and some of them even follow the Hindu method of solemnising marriages by employing a Brahmin priest. The uttering of 'Haribol,' sprinkling of

Tulsījal or *Gangājal* for sanctifying, *Sādhūālī* etc. are a few rites borrowed from the Hindu castes and communities of the area.

The present day Orāon practise of immersing the navel after cremation is also another borrowed Hindu rite. The purificatory rite '*Nāpti*' after child birth and death performed by the Nāpit caste (barbār), is also a custom imbibed from the Hindus. The taboos and prohibitions observed during mourning period by the Orāons are similar to those prevalent amongst the neighbouring Hindus.

The above are a few of the instances of different traits of 'rites de passage' imbibed by the immigrant Orāons which have been discussed in detail in an earlier chapter (Chapter VII). They now consider these borrowed traits as very important and almost essential in their social life. The present-day Orāons have also begun to utilise the services of the special castes like Nāpit (barbar caste) Ghāsi (midwife) and Brāhmin (priest) who play specific roles in the Hindu social customs.

In kinship system of the Orāons of Sunderban, a number of kinship terms have been incorporated from multiple sources. The original Orāon kinship terms are used side by side with local Hindu (Bengalee) and a few Muslim terms.

The ceremonial friendship with other ethnic groups (*Bandhu* and *Bandhuni* types) though with infrequent occurrence, is also another indication of the inter-ethnic relationship pattern.

The social relationship pattern can also be visualised from casual talks between the Orāons and the members of other neighbouring communities, and this reveals a sweet social intimacy among them. The Orāons often use *Dādā* (elder brother) or *Kākā* (Father's younger brother) etc. as terms of address while making conversation with the Hindu neighbours e.g. an Orāon asks Subal Mondal, (a Bagdi) "Subaldā (i.e. Subaldādā), where are you going?" But in case of rich and influential Muhammadans *Sāheb* is used e.g. Basiruddin Sāheb (Basiruddin Ahmed is an influential Muslim of Boyārmāri). The caste Hindus and the Muhammadans, generally, do not

use the above or any other terms of address towards these people, they simply call them by their names.

Formerly the Orāons of this area had a very strong notion about the purity of their community and fear of pollution of the same. According to their version, they were like 'Brahmins' and used to put on sacred threads (*Paitā*) and themselves conducted the worship of gods and goddesses. In the days of their migration into this area of Bengal, they would not take water and cooked food from different ethnic groups such as Bāgdi, Māhishya, Turi, Pod, Kaibarta and Muhammadans and others excepting chapped rice (*chidā*), sweets, green fruits etc. For supporting the above statement, some of our informants even said that their grand-fathers even now would not accept water, cooked food etc. from the hands of different Hindu castes and Muslims.

But this type of restriction at present, has been much relaxed among the male Orāons though some married males and most of the females still try to stick to the old customs (as stated by a number of Orāons). The women of this society generally, do not take water and cooked food from the non-Orāon communities specially, after getting maturity. But the male Orāons, at present (excepting a few married ones) take almost everything including water and cooked food from almost all the communities excepting the Muhammadans and some menial castes like Ghasi, Dom and such other castes of the area. According to an Orāon version, the malefolk of almost all the Hindu castes and communities take only water and uncooked food from the Orāons. But the femalefolk of these communities generally refrain from it. The poor Muhammadans take everything from the Orāons but the richer and influential people of this community would not take anything. But according to the versions of different Hindu castes, they (these castes) would take neither water nor food from the Orāons and other tribal groups as they are regarded as *Ādibāsis* or *Buno-jāt*, almost in the same way they would refuse to take anything from Muhammadans, Ghāsis, and Doms etc. as they are regarded as unclean.

The above-mentioned restrictions in free mixing with

other communities are slowly disappearing as their social contact with them is getting more and more free.

(C) POLITICAL SPHERE :

In the political sphere of their activities, the interaction between the Orāons and other ethnic groups is not so intimate as in other spheres. It is true that with the help of some influential Hindus and Muslims, some Orāons have become good political workers of the area but most of them are still not very much conscious and enlightened regarding the importance of these activities. A few cases have also happened in recent times where an influential Orāon has dethroned the hereditary village head with the help of influential local caste Hindus and Muslims. The village politics, is gradually getting into the hands of richer and influential sections of the Orāon society and some people belonging to local Hindu castes and also Muslims are instigating them in their local politics often with some ulterior personal motives.

(D) RELIGIOUS SPHERE

Among the Orāons of Sunderban the presence of pluralistic religious ideologies may be noticed and puritanism also is, in this society, having its sway among them. Their religious beliefs and practices have greatly been affected by the Hindu ideology. They are worshipping more and more different Hindu gods and goddesses such as *Kālī*, *Manasa*, *Sitalā*, *Mahādeva* etc. and their traditional deities (such as *Jhākrāburiā*, *Devimāi* etc.) are gradually sinking more and more into insignificance. These Sunderban Orāons regard the Hindu deity '*Kālī*' (*Mā Kālī*) as the Mother Goddess unlike the Ranchi Orāons among whom *Devimāi* occupies the same position. Some of the deities of Deltaic Bengal (Sunderban area) such as *Banbibi*, *Daksin Roy* etc. which are worshipped by different ethnic groups of this area, also play dominant role in the Orāon religious beliefs and practices. Besides their own community as well as household festivals and *pujās*, they also

sometimes participate in some of the festivals of the neighbouring Hindu castes of the area. During dearth and draught, these tribal folk together with the Hindu castes and communities of the area take part in the worship of Lord *Indra* (King of gods and goddesses of the Hindus) and pray for rain. Sometimes the Orāons employ Hindu Brahmins as priests (instead of their own community priest) for worshipping *Nārāyan*, *Laksmi*, *Saraswati* etc. which have been borrowed from the neighbouring Hindu castes. The use of *Gangājal* (sacred water of the Ganges), *Tulsijal* (sanctified Basil water), '*Dhān-Durbā*' (paddy and grass), leaves of Basil, wood-apple etc in different *pujās* has also been borrowed from the neighbouring Hindus. The blowing of conch-shells and uttering of *u'u ulu* sounds during festive occasions are also typical Hindu practices borrowed from the neighbouring castes. But the Hindu castes and also the Muslims around the Orāons have hardly been influenced by the ideology and practices of the Orāons though they do indirectly participate in some of the Orāin festivals and *Pujās*.

Sometimes some *Śādhus* or ascetics (belonging to Brahmin and Vaishnab castes) act as religious initiators of some of the Hinduised Orāons. The *Śādhus* also sing *Śādhuali* songs, and during different *pujās* (of *Nārāyan*, *Laksmi* etc.) they recite the glory of the respective deities. It is also seen that many Orāons are giving subscriptions in different Hindu *pujās* celebrated at the community level e.g. *Durgā Pujā*, *Kālī Pujā* etc., and participating therein though they do not take active part.

Thus it is seen that these immigrant Orāons of Southern Bengal have been considerably influenced by the neighbouring castes and communities of the area in the matter of rites and ceremonies, but these communities too have been influenced by the Orāons to some extent in the matter of performance of magical rites. When a Hindu or Muslim is suspected of spirit possession or believed to be attacked by a witch or wizard etc., his or her relatives are sometimes seen to call in certain Orāon magical practitioners or medicine-men whose fame has spread beyond the village boundary.

CHAPTER X

RECREATION, MODERNISATION AND WELFARE

(a) RECREATION

Every one needs some sort of recreation to get rid of the burden of day-to-day life. He must have something refreshing and delightful outside the usual run of activities in the midst of stereotyped monotony to tone up his jaded nerves. Recreation is one of the most important factors that bring fresh zeal and energy into a life which is overworked and exhausted in the struggle for existence.

The Sunderban Orāons derive recreational facilities in connection with the following.

1. Social ceremonies.
2. Magico-religious festivities.
3. Sports and games.

The social ceremonies like birth, marriage, etc. provide an Orāon family with boundless joy and pleasure. The expression of joy and cheer during these occasions in a family, is also reflected on the faces of the neighbours, kins, sibmen, and spreads through the whole village; and the whole village reacts as one single unit on these occasions. The out-bursts of joy, rhythm of songs and melody of musical instruments give clean indications that some pleasant festival is going on in the village. Every festival of house-hold or community level

of the Orāons of Sunderban creates a tremendous outburst of joy. This breaks the routinised monotony of their daily life. All people, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, wearing the best of their clothings and ornaments, come out of their houses under the open sky. They worship the deity concerned on the occasion, and then dance and sing and go on drinking *hāndiā* to their heart's content till midnight. The associated feast consisting of delicious dishes also breaks the monotony of their routine diet. No routine work is generally done on a festive day, which is spent in mirth and joy of the occasion.

Though sports and games are not much prevalent among the Orāons of this tract still some are fond of different games. The Tribal Welfare Centre (*Ādibāsi Kalyān Kendra*) arranges sports every year in Boyermāri-Nazat village wherein the Orāons along with other tribal people participate freely, which is also a good source of joy and recreation for them. Some local games like *Kapāṭi*, *Dānguli*, *Guli* etc. are also popular among the younger generation and are relished very much. Football game is also gaining popularity among these people.

Further, in some villages pony races, organised occasionally by the neighbouring people, are also witnessed and relished by these Sunderban Orāons.

Another popular game of the locality is cock-fighting which is occasionally arranged and enjoyed by all people, both tribals and non-tribals. These fighting cocks are reared up with utmost care. The whole period, from *Āshār-Srāvan* (July-August) to *Saraswatī Pujā* (January-February) is the season for cock-fight.

On the day of fighting, the contending cocks are taken to the place of fight accompanied with music. Each fighting cock has a small sharp pointed piece of iron weapon tied to one of its legs with which the winner causes serious injury to the vanquished, and the owner of the winner gets the vanquished cock as the trophy. These cock-fights provide very good occasions for mirth and joy for all people of the locality.

Female Orāons do not participate actively in any of these sports and games but they partake of the joy of these occasions as observers.

During *Tusu* festival, which is almost exclusively a festival for the females, they enjoy the whole day dancing and singing.

In Ranchi district also, the recreational pattern among the Orāons is practically similar though the actual games slightly differ from those of the Sunderban area.

Now-a-days a few Orāons and other tribal people of this alluvial plain of Sunderban visit cinema houses and *Jātrās* (local dramatic performances) which bring fresh enthusiasm and joy for the people. *Jātrā* is also organised by the Ranchi Orāons too, but without any systematic drama as done in the case of the Sunderban Orāons.

Some people are trying to organise now-a-days among the Sunderban Orāons *Chhou* dances of the type prevalent in Purulia and adjoining areas where mask dances are held depicting Hindu mythological stories and these are gaining popularity.

It is thus seen that in addition to the traditional recreations, the Sunderban Orāons have adopted newer ones from the surrounding locality more and more with increased availability of urban type facilities.

(b) MODERNISATION

"This place was covered with dense forests and full of wild animals; and we intrepidly faced the inroads of the tigers, snakes, crocodiles etc. in the forests and rivers, and gradually we reclaimed the impassable thickets," thus narrated Rabi Sardar (aged 85) one of the few surviving representative of the first settlers in this area, while presenting before us a picture of the earliest days.

"No similarity, yes, no similarity, exists between the two phases, the Sunderban of those days when I came over here as a boy of 15 or so and the Sunderban of today, of my grandsons who are about twenty years or so".

Tarak Sardar, the grandson of the old Rabi Sardar affirmed his grandfather's version, "Yes, *Burabābā* told us the

story of the great Sunderban of the old days. But at present you do not see the awe-inspiring ever-green thick forests of ancient Sunderban excepting a trace here and there. Yes, the land has been denuded of its dense ever-green forests, and now decorated with luxuriantly growing paddy fields during the cultivating season extending for miles around and giving a smiling pleasant look to the area".

In place of a romantic and adventurous life of the earliest immigrant Orāons in this once dreadful area, one would now find peaceful settled life in the fertile reclaimed land. New ideas of modern times have gradually infiltrated into the area and added variety to the life of the present generation, which is gradually losing its simplicity and assuming complexities of the modern ways of life.

"There were no roads worth the name in those early days, and we had to travel through the narrow strips of tracks in between fields, and had to secure drinking water from rivers, canals or ponds. Malaria was reigning with full vigour and hardly any medicine", exclaimed the old man.

"But at present, life has become much easier and smoother. We can get pure water from the tube-wells. There are quite a number of roads also—and many more are in the making", continued the old man, "we had to walk a distance of twenty miles or over to consult a medical man in case of serious illness; but new medical facilities have become more easily available, and Malaria too has practically disappeared from the region". "But, it is between you and me", whispered the old man when asked about the demerits of modernisation in their life," the traditional sense of morality is gradually breaking down, and these young chaps are losing their simplicity, and taking more and more to the frivolousness of the modern days, thereby losing their traditional norms and values".

The Orāons of Sunderban are adopting the trends of ideas of modernisation quite freely. The development of better and easier communication facilities, particularly to the nearby urban centres, have accelerated the import of modern ideas amongst them. Instead of walking long distance they, at present avail of the facility of passenger buses etc. to cover

up short or long distances in much shorter time. Along with the progress of different developmental schemes, the Sunderban area has been much developed, leading to an easier but more complicated life.

It is true that when these people were planted in the midst of jungle nearly a century ago, they hardly got any opportunity of coming in contact with the modern world on account of the absence of link with advanced areas. They had to remain satisfied with their traditional modes of life as far as possible in the new environment.

But with the increased facilities for import of modern ideas, they are, on the one hand, tuning themselves up with the facilities of modernisation and, on the other hand, their mental poise and physical well-being are being appreciably affected by the complexities of modern life. With the process of modernisation, they have gained many benefits such as modern education, modern communication, modern treatment, modern recreation etc. but they have tended to become a bit quarrelsome and self-conscious. The spread of modern education has broadened their knowledge and rendered them bolder. Previously, they had to submit to the torture of their landlords' agents. But now, they would not stand any such thing from any source and would rush to the court for redress of a wrong aimed at them. They now feel that they were exploited a good deal formerly, and now they are trying to prevent such exploitations and are conscious of the laws that would save them from any attempt at any economic exploitation.

Now-a-days a few well-to-do Orāon families possess radio sets, and the programmes from these are attended by people of the surrounding houses; and this also is very helpful in the spread of modern ideas.

This trend of rapid modernisation has also got its dark side. As previously stated, many of these people have become individualistic minded which has even led in some cases to break down of traditional joint family system.

The younger section is gradually getting less and less attached to the traditional norms and behaviours. The tribal endogamy and clan exogamy have in some cases been dis-

regarded. The incidence of love affairs has been increasing. Tendency towards fashionable dresses and consumer goods and addiction to modern intoxicants such as cigarettes, country liquor (*Pochāi* or *Dheno*) etc. have also increased adding to difficulties in adjustment of the family budget. Another baneful effect is the tendency towards increased incidences of venereal diseases etc. And all these are affecting the traditional social solidarity and straining their economic structure.

A similar picture is also available in the remarks of Fuchs⁶⁰ quoted below. "A life above their economic status, however low, together with the serious disturbances of their economic and social principles, dissatisfaction with their traditional religion, and other factors are responsible for reducing the aborigines to a state that borders on despair or dull resignation to the inevitable. It appears that the mental stamina of the aborigines is inadequate for their present task which the hard competition with superior cultures and peoples forces upon them".

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur also are being affected by similar forces of modernisation. Further, the seasonal migrations have helped them to come in touch with modern life and ideas of urban and industrial cities to which they migrate, and as a result the traditional ways of their life are being affected in a way more or less similar to those of the Sunderban Orāons.

(c) WELFARE MEASURES

When the Sunderban was being reclaimed, the *Jotedārs* brought in large numbers of tribals from Chotā-Nāgpur, Mayurbhanj, Singhbhum and Manbhum districts, and employed them as labourers for cutting the jungle and erecting the *bundhs*. Many of them remained behind and secured some land for regular settlement therein. Within a century, due to their thriftless habit and manoeuvring of the *Jotedārs* with the *bundhs*, they lost most of these lands, and are now the poorest cultivators in the area.

In their old *Pāttās* (very few are in existence now), they

are described as *Murā Bunā*, *Orāon Bunā*, *Sāntāl Bunā* etc. showing their descent from the scheduled tribes concerned, and later on they retained the general surname *Buno* (Wild). This is why even survey or census operations could not correctly classify them, and that is why even after the extension of Chapter-VII (A) of Bengal Tenancy Act to these people, they could not fully avail themselves of its provisions, and lands continued to be lost as speedily as before.

This explains the incidence of a large number of B. T. Act cases that cropped up after the Tribal Welfare Department had extended its attention to the tribals of this district. Many petitions regarding the same, were inquired into and a good number disposed of, ending in restoration of many acres of land to the tribal petitioners. This work is entrusted to the Special Officer, Tribal Welfare appointed by the Tribal Welfare Department for the district.

The use of the generic title *Buno* for all these tribals for so many years, sometimes makes it difficult to trace their individual origin, and as the special provision of Chapter VII (A) of B. T. Act is often stultified by dishonest land-grabbers *Gunju*, *Nāgbangshi*, *Purāng*, *Dhāki*, *Murāri*, *Māhāṭo Murā*, *Khāngar* and such other surnames, taken up at random, now stand in the way of the application of the B. T. Act even in genuine cases.

Their general backwardness is further evidenced by the fact that there was large-scale omission or wrong recording of their interests during the recent settlement operation. The Government took special measures for giving them relief.

Time for filing objections was extended by an ordinance; special staff was appointed by the Tribal Welfare Department. Striking results have been obtained. Many cases were filed under the Estates Acquisition Act (for recording of tribal share-cropper's right) after the extension of the time for the filing of objections, and many more are under investigation, filed within time. A *Kānungo* (Surveyor) is specially employed by the Tribal Welfare Department for the purpose.

Incidentally, the general problem which confronts the entire population of the Sunderban, is ingress of saline water

due to breaches in the long line of embankments, which engulfs the reclaimed paddy fields in this area. The Government is spending huge sums annually for the protection of the *bundhs* which keep off saline water from the cultivable fields.

In order to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribal folk of this area, the State Government is spending huge sums of money every year.

As the majority of tribal folk of this area practise agriculture, a great deal of emphasis has been given to improve their agricultural practices. Measures in this sector include introduction of improved seeds, manures and chemical fertilisers, improvement of live-stocks, extension of irrigational facilities, encouragement of homestead, vegetable-cum-fruit gardening etc. In addition to the above, encouragement is given to pig rearing, goat keeping poultry keeping etc. as subsidiary means of livelihood. Encouragement is also given to the tribals to take to trade and crafts. Co-operative Grain Golās, Co-operative Marketing Society, Cremery Society etc. have also been opened for them in different areas.

Regarding education, it is recognised that due to poverty and backwardness, the urge for education among them is not very strong. In consideration of their educational backwardness, special facilities have been provided for them. These have been mainly adopted in the secondary stage, and the Government provided free tuition facilities at the secondary stage. Apart from this, other schemes, such as book-grants, examination fees, boarding charges, hostel facilities etc. are also given to them. In the post-secondary stages, stipends are given to every one of the tribal students.

Apart from the schemes of educational advancement and economic uplift, other miscellaneous schemes covering the different sectors such as health, housing, roads etc. have also been undertaken for the welfare of the tribals.

For removing the scarcity of good drinking water in tribal areas, new sources of water-supply are being constructed.

For opening up and improving communication facilities

in the interior of tribal areas, roads and village roads, culverts, bridgeways and cause-ways have been constructed.

Dispensaries are given grants for supply of costly medicines to poor tribal patients free of charges.

Tribal Welfare Centres have been started, and encouragement is given towards sports, tribal culture, night-schools, community activities etc. and arrangements are also made for rendering free legal advice to them in suitable cases.

CHAPTER: XI

FOLKLORE

Heavy rain, flood, cyclone, failure of crops and consequent extreme poverty etc., at times produce a jarring note and tend to dry up the melody of their hearts, still in the midst of all these adversities, the buoyancy of their habitually cheerful temperament prevails, and they do not fail to enjoy their psalms of life, that reflect more of the sweet serenity of the pleasant Sunderban landscapes, and not much of their tradition and antiquity.

In general, the Orāons of this area sing only off and on, except a very few youngsters who would usually be seen walking gaily through the paths singing a light folk song or a popular film song or some modern Bengali song. In leisure times, the old men or women are noticed to narrate to the little ones many tales of their olden days and traditions.

But the soiree accompanied with music and dance which takes place every evening in most of the Orāon villages in Chotā-Nāgpur, is not prevalent amongst the Sunderban Orāons, and it is only on the festive occasions that the Sunderban Orāons, drenched with *hāndiā* to their heart's content, enjoy fully the songs and dances appropriate to the occasion, accompanied with the tunes of drums, flutes and other musical instruments.

Though there are differences in the words and apparent meanings of these folksongs of Sunderban on these festive

occasions, as compared to those of the Ranchi area, yet the essence and objective of the songs are almost identical in both areas. Some of these folksongs have a touch of modernism and also of ideas of Hindu society of the respective areas.

Some examples of songs and tales of Sunderban Orāons are given in the forthcoming pages. It should be mentioned here that some of these songs and tales similar to them, are also prevalent amongst other tribals and also among the backward castes and communities of the Sunderban area.

For a week prior to the *Karam* festival in the month of *Bhādra* (August-September), the Orāon women sing different *Karam* songs.

Etā Etā Jāoā Kiā Kiā
Jāoā Jāoā Jāgala Mor
Dhānā Bohurā re.....(1)

Etā Etā Jāoā Kiā Kiā
Jāoā Jāoā Jāgala Mor
Gaham Bohurā re.....(2)

Etā Etā Jāoā Kiā Kiā
Jāoā Jāoā Jāgala Mor
Jenor Bohurā re.....(3)

Etā Etā Jāoā Kiā Kiā
Jāoā Jāoā Jāgala Mor
Sarisā Bohurā re.....(4)

(Which are these seedlings ? These are the seedlings of paddy which I planted.....(1)

(Which are these seedlings ? These are the seedlings of wheat which I planted.....(2)

(Which are these seedlings ? These are the seedlings of maize which I planted.....(3)

(Which are these seedlings ? These are the seedlings of mustard which I planted.....(4)

In these way they sing *Karam* songs after all the types of seeds are planted in the basket meant for *Karam* festival.

Just before the beginning of *Karam* festival when they tie the umbrella with the *Karam* tree, the womenfolk sing along with the instruments, played by the boys :—

Oh *Karam*,
 We are giving you this
 Beautiful umbrella,
 Give us bumper crops
 And milch cows.

Archer⁶¹ has also given almost identical *Karam* songs of the Chotā-Nāgpur Orāons.

Karam, Karam O Karam Raja
 For you O Karam is a royal umbrella
 Give us O Karam rice and riches
 Give us O Karam Sweets and Cattle
 For you O Karam is a royal umbrella

During *Karam* festival they also sing *Jhumur* songs. These in most cases portray their social life, their sorrows and joys—in their day-today life.

Nāhi āṛā Jābo Kāike
 Cheurā Moi Kuṭāli
 Seh Cheurā Dhān Mesāi Delāi
 Nāhi-āṛā Jāi Nāi Delāi
 Balī Hāire.....
 Sāyā Nāhi-ārā Jāi Nāhi Delāi.
 Nāhi-ārā Jābo Kāike
 Telā Moi Kināli
 Seh Telā Kere Lukāi Delāi
 Hāire.....
 Nāhi-ārā Jāi Nāhi Delāi.

(I have pounded chapped rice in order to go to my father's house. But some one has mixed paddy into it. Alas, I am not allowed to go to my father's house. I have purchased oil in order to go to my father's house. But somebody has hidden that oil. Alas, I am not allowed to go to my father's house).

Besides these in some social and familial affairs, the Hindu mythological facts have also been included in the *Jhumur* songs. These mythological stories are not, sometimes depicted in to-to, but often remodelled by them with their own colour and choice. The following is a *Jhumur* song the fact of which has been taken from the Hindu epic, *Rāmāyana*.

Keshālīā Dhuni Dhuni Kāṇde

Kosholyā Rāni,

Bali Hāire Hāire Hāi.

Bhārat Nirpati Ke Bhāi

Hārālī Ayodhyāpuri

Rām O Chālālāi Banabāse

Bali Hāire Hāire Hāi.

(Alas Queen Koushalyā weeps shaking her head,

King Bharat has lost his brother,

Ram has lost the kingdom of Ayodhyā

And Rām is also going on exile to the Forest).

They also lament with the sorrow of *Sitā* the wife of *Rāmāyana* hero, *Rāmchandra* when *Rāwana*, the king of *Lankā* abducted her.

“The golden deer has deceived Rām.

The King of Lankā has abducted Sitā.

She weeps bitterly.

Alas what will happen.”

In the month of *Māgh* (January-February) when the Hindus worship Goddess *Saraswati*, the Orāons perform *Sādhuālī* or *Sābdi* in which the *Sādhus* (ascetics) sing different *Sādhuālī* songs. These songs are also sung during post-funeral rite of some house who have taken *Sādhuālī mantras*.

Āhu Ho Sānta Shā

Chāuka Chhāri Bāusu

Hiyā Rākhāle Bichhāye

Gaiyākā Gabarāhi

Āngenā Lipāye

Sabe Sādhu Chāukā Purāi.

Āhu Ho Sānta Shā

Chāukā Chhāri Bāusu

Hiyā Rākhali Bichhāye

Sanekerā Diyā Rahe

Rupekerā Bāti

Premākā Telā Ho

Bāre Sārā Rāti.

Āhu Ho Sānta Shā

Chāukā Chhāri Bāusu.....

Sibā Nārāyaṇ Guru Kahe, Samujahe,
Sibā Nārāyaṇ Phirāt Sansār.
Āhu Ho Sānta Shā

Chāukā Chhāri Bāusu.....

[Oh, you peace-loving sages! Come along and sit here keeping your broad mind open. The courtyard has been bedaubed with cow-dung paste. Come all and utter the names of gods. In the lamp of gold with the wick of silver, put in oil of love (so that) it keeps burning whole night (i.e. whole life). *Siva*, and *Nārāyaṇ* and *Guru* say that the world is maintained by them].

On an analysis of this type of songs, it would be clearly evident that most of these songs have been inspired by Hindu religious ideas. Prayers to Hindu deities emerge prominently in these songs. This is also illustrated in the following *Sādhū-āli* song.

Oh hear the glory of *Siva*.

Oh hear the glory of *Nārāyaṇ*

Siva-Nārāyaṇ have created this land

Siva-Nārāyaṇ are maintaining this land

Oh you all hear the tale of *Siva*

Oh you all hear the tale of *Nārāyaṇ*.

Here it may be pointed out that songs of this type are totally absent among the Orāons of Chotā Nāgpur, but one would easily find them prevalent among different castes of Deltaic Bengal.

In the month of *Pous* (December-January) they observe *Ṭusu* festival (vide Chapter on Magico-Religious Beliefs and Practices). They consider the deity *Ṭusu* as akin to their daughter or daughter-in-law or a member of their own family. Through these songs they express their sorrows and miseries, their joy and happiness, their utter poverty and depressed condition, their human love and devotion. In connection with *Ṭusu* festival in the Chapter on Magico-Religious Beliefs and Practices, we have shown through some songs, the familial sentiment of these people. Now, we shall give a few more examples of *Ṭusu* songs.

Āmār Ṭusu Kāje, Jābe,
Khidē Pele Khābe Ki ?

De Ṭusu Gāyer Ānchal

Bhāt Māchh Bendhe Di

(My Ṭusu will go for work. What will she take when she feels hungry? Ṭusu, give me the hem of your garment. I shall tie in it boiled rice and fish curry).

It is not that they always think Ṭusu as their daughter or some other relative, but sometimes consider her as a deity and so worship her.

“To-day is the last day
Of the month of Pous,
Oh girls, come all
And bring oil, flower, rice
And let us worship mother Ṭusu”.

Ṭusu songs of different nature are also sung by these people. They record different developmental works through these songs. When the new roads are constructed and the cars start coming to the area, they sing:—

Gāri Elo Dhum Dhum Kore
Bānsi De Ṭusu Bār Kore
Elo Gāri Chole Gelo,
Jorā Bānsi Bājlo Nā.

(The car has come with crackling sound.
Ṭusu, bring out and give us the oboes.
Car comes and the car goes away
The pair of flutes does not play).

The modern conveyances have brought the far-away places near to their house. The farthest one is no longer far. They can now easily go to urban centres like Calcutta by bus within a short time, and can easily enjoy the entertainments of the city.

“Ṭusu will go to Calcutta by Motor Bus,
There Ṭusu will see
With utmost enjoyment
Cinema and circus.”

In Ṭusu songs, they sometimes project their love for the sweet hearts in the same line with the famous love of *Krishna* and *Rādhā*, the Hindu mythological hero and heroine.

E Pārāte, O Pārāte
Tangālām Phuler Mālā.
Se Mālā Sukāye Gelo
Elo Nā Chikana Kālā.

[In this hamlet, in that hamlet, I kept the garland of flower hanging (for my *Kṛisna* i.e. my lover). Those garlands have dried up. But the beautiful Kālā (*Kṛisna* i.e. lover) has not come].

At the end of the month of *Chaitra* (March-April), the *Sārhuḷ* festival starts. This festival brings new life, new light and fresh enthusiasm among them as at the beginning of the new year, new fruits and new flowers appear. The *Sārhuḷ* songs (generally the songs of joy of the new year) fill their hearts with new pleasure and fresh zeal. They sing in utmost joy:—

Ke Tarā Kāte Jhātṇi Chārāyā Jhāk
Nāndān Bane Bhāi
Ke Tarā Ghor Nā Ghore
Bāp Tarā Kāte Jhātṇi Chārāyā Jhāk,
Māi Tarā Ghor Nā Ghore
Āho Nāndān Bone Bhāi
Māi Tarā Ghor Nā Ghore

(Who is felling tree in your Garden of Eden? Who is fencing your garden? Your father is felling the tree, And your Mother is fencing. Oh! your mother is fencing the Garden of Eden).

When *Sārhuḷ* comes they become busy with the arrangements of the festival.

Oh Pāhān let us go for bath
The *Sārhuḷ* has come,
The *Sārhuḷ* has come,
Oh Pāhān let us collect flower.

They wait for this day as this is for joy, recreation, purity and relaxation. They drink, they dance, and sing:—

To-day is the day of *Sārhuḷ*
Let us dress new
Let us wear the garland of *Nim* flower
Let us dance and sing
To-day is *Sārhuḷ*

Among the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur almost identical

songs can be heard. They sing in joy and delight :—

Mūno jhāra Gosāin, bothā jhārā!

Hāe-re Khāddi mānoey!

Hāe-re Phāgū mānoey!

Gosāin Sārem!

Hio-hi dal dal! Hio-hi dal dal!

(New rice-beer god! Dregs of rice-beer!

O, it is Sarhul;

O, it is Phāgu!

The Phāgu god! The Sarhul god!

Come! Let us play!

Come! Let us play!)

(Roy : 1928 : 201)

These people of Sunderban cannot take the mango and jack-fruits until the *Sārhu* is finished. The little boys and girls become joyous and sonorous with the appearance of mango and jack-fruit blossoms :—

Āmer Gāchhe Bol Dharechhe

Kāṇṭhāl Gāchhe Phul,

Kālinagar Hāṭe Jāba

Kinbo Notun Dul.

(The blossoms have appeared in the Mango tree.

The blossoms have appeared in the Jack-fruit tree.

I shall go to the market at Kalinagar

I shall purchase a new ear-ring).

It is not only during religious festivities that they sing, but during marriage or such other social ceremonies also they burst out with songs and dances. Even without any occasion the young boys are seen to sing. In connection with marriage we have cited various marriage songs. Here are a few more of such songs or gists thereof:—

“The music is heard in the village.

To-day Sahadev is going to marry.

Rub your face with powder, Sahadev.

Dress yourself new, Sahadev.

You are going to marry to-day.”

Sahadev's friends cut jokes and make fun with him as Sahadev is going to marry to-day. Sahadev's house is devoid

of any wife. The old mother asks him to bring a wife. Sahadev agrees.

Mother, keep the door open
I shall bring your daughter-in-law
Mother, keep the courtyard clean
I shall bring your daughter-in-law.

The Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur also sing such marriage songs. Archer⁶² has cited one of such songs:—

You have sold your daughter, mother
You have done well
Your house is empty
You have brought a daughter-in-law, mother
You have done well
Your house is bright.

Besides the above songs connected with different socio-religious festivities, they also sing different love songs. Personal love constitutes another principal theme in their folk songs. Their psychology of love is to develop keen attraction and attachment to one of the opposite sex—the beloved sweet-heart. They give expression to their emotion and passionate love for the opposite sex through these love-ones. The poverty, the misery and the distress of their routine-life cannot bale out love from their hearts. When the youth blooms in their heart, they develop a sweet sensation of the mysterious affairs of life that get expression in these love songs. It is true that they are not rich with the luxuriance of love lyrics, still their stolid hearts become sonorous with raving lure of this mysterious sensation when youth develops in them.

Piyā Āmār Āsbe Bole
Böse Āchhi Patha Cheye,
Āmār Piyā Āsbe Je Go
Sānjer Belā E Path Diye,
Piriṭ Āmār Jwale Buke
E Pirit Kāre Dībo ?
Āmār Piyā Āle Pare
Pirit Diye Ghare Libo.

(I am awaiting for the arrival of my beloved; she will come by this way. In this evening she will come. My love blazes in my bosom, to whom shall I give that? When my beloved will come, I shall give it to her and take her home).

The nature nourishes these folk-minds with its beauties and serenity. They learn to love, and sometimes witness and feel their beloved in different objects—this comparison of the one's beloved with other personal or impersonal body is what Sokolov⁶³ calls "*psychological parallelism*". Here they sometimes identify their lovers with mythical divinities. They are also conscious that this secret love will be considered by the society to be a breach of social rule, still they continue.

Hāme Nā Jānāli Dutī
 Hāme Nā Jānāli,
 Sunder Kamal Kāyā,
 Kulme Dubāli
 Dutī, Hāme Nā Jānāli
 Dhal Mandār Bānsi Suni
 Bāhār Bheli
 Dutī, Hāme Nā Jānāli.

(Oh, why did you not let me know, my friend, for, your lotus-like beautiful body, you have immersed in the quagmire, and destroyed the family prestige. Hearing the melodious tunes of flute, you have forshaken your house. Why did you not tell me before, my friend?).

Their love thickens when the rain comes or when the paddy is harvested. The rain makes their mind listless as it happens with other human beings.

Their youthful heart becomes full with the influx of love at the advent of rain, as to them, like others, the rain time love is based on a feeling of deportation, and this theme of separation from the beloved sharpens the feelings of love in them. They sing in despair, while dreaming of their lover.

The rain has come
 My house is empty
 How shall I spend the rainy days
 My love, without you?

The heart hankers after the lover. But the cruel rain does not allow these two thirsty souls to be together. The rain at last ceases. The paddy in the field, getting the chilly touch of winter, turns golden. The harvest starts. The heart becomes full of ardent desire to meet the beloved. What is the use of taking home this golden paddy if the house is devoid of the lover?

The paddy in the field has ripened.
The smell of it impregnates the wind,
When, my love, will you come
With garland of water-lilly in your neck
And cook this rice for me ?

The folk songs of the Orāons of Sunderban receive the mixed expression of their tradition and the regional influence, though the latter dominates over the former. They learn some of the songs from their neighbouring castes and communities, but in many cases, they prepare the songs themselves. Very recently cinema and radio songs have increased the taste for modern songs, and thus sometimes in their festive occasions specially during social ceremonies like marriage etc., they sing cinema or radio songs. Of the cinema songs, the Bengali films have absolute predominance as usually they do not know Hindi, nor relish Hindi films.

So long we have discussed the folk-songs as sung by the Orāons of Sunderban. Now we shall give some folk tales of these people. These stories may be grouped into two categories (i) Tales of olden times or mythical stories (ii) Recent or modern stories. Some of these stories are presented here just to give an idea about the sort of tales prevalent here. The first two of these belong to the former category i.e. mythological stories.

(I) THE LEGEND OF CREATION:

Long, long ago, in time immemorial *Bhagwān* or *Dharma* created the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and the Earth. At that time on the earth, there were no animals, plants etc. but

only water. This condition of earth prevailed for a long time. Then the Supreme God levelled the uneven earth with an iron leveller, and then created plants, aquatic animals and different land animals. Then one day he thought of creating human beings. He made two earthen figures, resembling man, one male and the other female, and allowed these to dry in the sun. When these dried up, he first endowed the male figure with life and then the female one, and thus the first male and female human beings came into existence on the earth. They then maintained lives with the plants and animals of the earth. When they grew up, the *Dharma* united them in marriage, and from their union the present human population originated.

(II) THE STORY OF KARAM RĀJĀ :

Some of the Orāons of the Sunderban area observe *Karam* festival in the month of *Bhādra* (August-September). At the end of the *pujā*, different tales connected with and eulogising *Karam Rājā* and *Karam* festival, are read.

The following is one such story: Long, long time ago in a kingdom, there were two brothers—*Karam* and *Dharam*. Of these two, *Karam* was very active and toiled the whole day doing different jobs. But *Dharam* had a quite opposite character. He was gentle, scrupulous, and religious minded. He spent most of his time performing various religious duties. One day, they both went to the King of the state, and prayed for money. The King asked both of them what they would do with the money. *Karam* said that he would go on a voyage for trading, but *Dharam* said he would purchase a plot of land with the money and cultivate therein flowers suitable for worshipping gods and live on the proceeds of their sale. The King gave money to each of them. With the money, *Karam* made arrangements and undertook a voyage for trading and soon amassed a lot of wealth. On the other hand, *Dharam* purchased with the money a rocky piece of unfertile land, on which he toiled hard with devotion and succeeded in growing plenty of large beautiful nice-smelling, flowers, which drew admiration of all people. A group of 101

fairies used to travel to *Kailāsh* for worshipping *Mahādeva* every night in a chariot following an airy route over *Dharam's* flower garden. Noticing the beautiful fragrant flowers of *Dharam's* garden, they used to lower the chariot, park it in front of the garden, pluck all the blossomed flowers and then resume their journey to *Kailāsh* to worship *Mahādeva* with these flowers. *Dharam* was astonished to find his garden denuded of all the bloomed flowers, and lay in ambush to catch the thieves. At dead of night, he discovered a chariot, standing in front of his garden, and he remained catching hold of the chariot by one wheel.

The fairies returned to their chariot after plucking all the flowers of *Dharam's* garden, and when they tried to restart the chariot for their journey to *Kailāsh*, it would not move. They looked round and discovered that their chariot was immobilised by *Dharam* who accused them of the serious financial loss caused to him by them, night after night, particularly as he was finding it difficult to give a square meal a day to his own people. The fairies disclosed their identity and asked him to seek from them a boon which he did. They were pleased and gave him a boon to the effect that even if a single grain of rice wood be cooked in his house, the entire inner space of the cooking pot would be completely filled up with cooked rice by their boon, and so his people would no longer remain half starved. They, further, instructed him to worship them on the 11th or 12th day of the month of *Bhādra*, and ask for any relief from them which would be granted by them and he would get whatever needed, if he prayed after planting in the ground a branch of a particular tree and worshipping the same carefully, wearing a new cloth.

Dharam's financial position improved by virtue of the boon of the fairies. He intended to perform the worship of the fairies, but as he did not possess all the articles necessary for the *pujā*, he prayed to the fairy goddesses for having the necessary items. With the grace of the fairies, *Dharam* had everything necessary for the *pujā*. All his neighbours also assembled in his courtyard to witness the *pujā*.

In the meantime, *Karam*, grown rich by profitable trade,

returned with his ship laden with treasures, and his ship laid anchor in the river by the side of his village. He wanted his ship to be unloaded, but no one would go to work there from *Dharam's* house where they were witnessing *Dharam's puja*. This infuriated *Karam*, and he rushed to *Dharam's* house, pulled out the branch planted by *Dharam* for worship and spoiled everything arranged for the *puja*, and threw away the branch with such force, that it went off to a very distant place beyond seven rivers.

Immediately after, he learnt that his ship, suffered a wreck from a sudden storm, and sank with all the treasures he had earned with hard toil all these days. He became extremely mortified and wept profusely. His brother *Dharam* consoled him and advised him to pray to the fairies for regaining his lost fortune which he did. The fairies advised him to seek out and get back the branch of the trees thrown away by him and worship the same devoutly in the proper manner, when only he would regain his lost fortune. *Karam* set out on a perilous journey, suffering terrible hardships. Apparently nice drinking water was converted into dirty mire, filled with worms as soon as he tried to drink it to quench his unbearable thirst. Troubled with uncheckable hunger, he begged for food, but nobody would help him, nor any one would help him to cross the river beyond which the branch had fallen. In spite of all these troubles he proceeded on and on, and a kind crocodile offered to help him to cross the seventh river if he would agree to remove from the crocodile's back a peg that had been lodged there. He agreed, and reaching the other side of the river, he kept his word and removed the peg from the crocodile's back. At last, he got back the branch thrown away by him. He bowed to the branch, and with all reverence brought it back to his village where the branch was planted again with meticulous care, and all necessary formality and the worship was performed by him, with the result that he regained all his lost treasures.

Thus, the festival was named as *Karam Puja* and the branch as *Karam* branch.

(III) THE OLD WOMAN AND THE THIEF :

In a village, there lived a very miserly old woman. In that village, there also lived a very notorious thief who was so clever that he would not leave behind any clue that would enable anyone to detect him as the thief. One day he stole some money and other articles from the house of that old woman. The woman became angry over this and planned to teach the thief a good lesson. After a few days she went to her son-in-law's house and stayed there for sometimes. After a few days when she came back to her own house, she whispered to her neighbours that her son-in-law had given her a pitcher full of gold coins and that she had kept the pitcher somewhere in the kitchen. After finishing her kitchen duties at night, she kept an wood-apple on the burning oven, a *Singi* fish (*Heteropneustes fossilis*) inside a pitcher containing water, a sharp-edged scythe at the doorway of the kitchen and a rick of cowdung on the courtyard in front of the kitchen, and with a long bamboo pole in hand, she remained hiding nearby.

At midnight, the thief came and broke into the kitchen. He searched here and there inside the kitchen but could not trace out the golden coins. Then he thought the old woman might have kept the pitcher within the oven, and as soon as he put his hand inside the oven, the wood apple, kept therein by the old woman, exploded with great force and the hot contents of the wood-apple burnt his face and body. In order to relieve his pain, he put his hand inside the pitcher which he thought contained cold water only. But he was soon disillusioned as the *Singi* fish (kept therein by the old woman) gave him a sharp prick with its poison-charged sharp-spike by the side of its head and the thief began suffering from unbearable pain which made him jump up, and tried to quickly get out of the kitchen, and in a hurry he placed his foot on the sharp scythe (kept at the doorway by the old woman) and sustained a big cut in the leg. He then jumped out of the kitchen and tried to run away but fell on the heap of soft cowdung and slipped down to the ground and broke his leg. The old woman then started shouting that a thief had come to her home. The vil-

lagers came running and caught the thief. The thief begged for mercy and rubbing his nose on the ground, made a solemn vow that he would never again take to stealing. The old woman became satisfied with the punishment already suffered by the thief and released him.

(IV) THE OLD MAN AND THE JACKAL :

Once upon a time an old man and his old wife lived in a place. Every morning the old man used to go to plough his field and at noon his wife used to carry to the field his lunch of stale rice. A jackal, who noticed this day after day, thought of cheating the old woman and eat away her husband's lunch. He met the old woman next day as soon as she started from home, and in a friendly way offered to carry the load of the lunch till she crossed the canal. The old woman believed the jackal and allowed him to carry the lunch pot. The jackal proceeded ahead quickly, and when out of sight of the old woman, ate the whole of the lunch, and when the old woman came up, he told her that the lunch had accidentally fallen into the canal and handed over the empty pot to her. The old woman went to her husband crying all the way and narrated everything to her husband, who could see through the trick of the jackal, and consoled her saying that he would teach the wicked fellow a lesson.

He told his wife the details of his plan for the next day and she stopped crying. Next day in the morning, the wife dressed like a male and went to the field to plough, and the old man, dressed like his wife started at noon for the field with the lunch pot. Thinking him to be the old woman, the jackal again thought of playing the trick, and eat away the lunch. He offered his services to carry the lunch pot beyond canal. With the lunch pot, he went ahead quickly and finished the lunch and as soon as the old man dressed like his wife came up, regretted the accident of the lunch having dropped into the canal, and asked him to follow so that he could show how the accident had happened. As soon as the jackal was about to show how the accident had happened, the old man

cought hold of his tail and severed it from the body with a knife. The jackal realised that he was tricked by the old man, and ran away saying that he would trouble the old man by polluting his plough. Next day the old man planted a few nails into the plough's handle. At night the jackal came up to the old man's house and having evacuated his bowels there, began to daub on the handle of the plough the faecal matter, with his hand. But no sooner had he started it then he sustained cuts on his hand from the sharp ends of the nails, planted therein by the old man, and ran away, shouting to the old man that he would take revenge by catching his fowls. Next evening the old man remained hiding inside the fowlshed, and when the jackal stole into the shed at night to kill the fowls the old man gave him severe blow at which the jackal ran away shouting that he would wreck vengeance by killing his sheep.

The old man remained hiding inside the sheep-sty in the evening, and at midnight when the jackal stole into the shed to kill sheep, the old man gave the jackal a severe blow. The jackal ran away cursing the old man and shouting that he would tease the old man and make his life miserable.

The old man thought out a plan to effectively eliminate this source of trouble and explained the details thereof to his wife. Next morning the old man remained in hiding and the old woman started lamenting piteously, and going to the forest with a basket, started collecting dry branches of trees. Hearing her cry, the jackal approached her and enquired about the cause. She said that her husband died suddenly sometime ago, and she was collecting dry fire-wood to cook the funeral feast for her husband's death. The jackal offered to help her if he would be invited to that feast. She agreed. Then the jackal called his friends and all became busy collecting a huge quantity of dry branches and carrying the same to the old woman's courtyard, and the old woman invited them to the funeral feast. On the night of the date of funeral feast declared by her, she started cooking and the wicked tail-less jackal along with other jackals came and waited for the feast. When the woman finished baking bread, she asked the

jackals to sit separately at good distance from each other in the dark corner of the courtyard, so that they might not quarrel with each other while eating. She served some food to all of them and as they were busy in eating, the old man came out of his hiding place and with a rope in his hand, came stealthily from behind the tailless jackal and suddenly tied him down firmly with the rope and started giving him such a good beating that the wicked tailless jackal started crying aloud and prayed to be excused, but the old man would not stop till it died. Meanwhile, the old man's friends around, who too were hiding, rushed out at other jackals and they all ran away in panic. Thus, the wicked cunning fellow was really taught a good lesson and effectively eliminated.

RIDDLES

Like the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur, the Sunderban Orāons also enjoy riddles. A few examples are given below:—

- (i) A thing that lives in water but also dies in touch of water—*Salt*.
- (ii) An old white woman has come out of a cage—*Cotton*
- (iii) A thousand fire-flies on a blue Sari—*Stars in the sky*.
- (iv) The boy with hundred eyes behind—*A Peacock*.
- (v) A palmyra-palm tree on a tank with fire in its head—*Hubble bubble*
- (vi) The man that casts his net for prey—*Spider*.
- (vii) Thousand moons in the pond—*Water-lily*.
- (viii) The living man that can stir its arms but cannot move—*A tree*.
- (ix) It has its entrails outside but flesh inside—*A paddy container*.
- (x) The old miser lives in a room having no door—*Silk cocoon*.
- (xi) The old man with numerous locks of matted hair—*A Banian tree*. ...
- (xii) The traveller that sees many places of the world—*A letter*.

- (xiii) The sage that keeps its body underground—*Araddish*.
- (xiv) The old man with long beard—*Maize*.
- (xv) The rat that commits nuisance when pressed—*Lemon*.
- (xvi) The animal that kills everything but dies in water—*Fire*.
- (xvii) The wood-pecker with long tail—*Axe*.
- (xviii) The bridge that connects heaven and earth—*Rainbow*.
- (xix) The old woman with wrinkles that cut the jungle—*Sickle*.
- (xx) The man that follows every one—*Shadow*.

OMENS AND SUPERSTITIONS:

The Orāons of Sunderban believe in many omens and superstitions. Some of these are also prevalent among the neighbouring Hindu castes. In connection with marriage some of these have already been mentioned and a few more are given below:—

(I) It is considered as a bad thing for a man if somebody shows him one eye (keeping other eye closed).

(II) It is considered bad if a cat or a dog weeps or two cats quarrel at dead of night.

(III) It is considered bad if a man sneezes when he just starts on his journey or hears the sound of sneezing.

(IV) The Hinduised Orāons consider it to be bad to see an ass or a tortoise on the way.

(V) The Hinduised Orāons consider it bad to see a very miserly person when he starts for some work or early in the morning just after getting up from bed.

(VI) They also consider it bad to see a jackal on the left side or a snake on the right side.

(VII) It is considered to be bad by them to cross a broom.

(VIII) If a man's foot itches it is believed that he may have to traverse a long distance.

(IX) If a man's left eye-lids fall rapidly or left eye quivers,

a harm may happen to him. But in case of right eye it is a good omen.

(X) They consider it bad to take the meat of a hen that has hatched egg.

(XI) To start just at midday (noon) on Saturday or Thursday is bad, as no good work will be performed satisfactorily, on account of starting at that inauspicious hour.

(XII) To see a white owl at night or day is considered good and fortunate, while to see an ordinary grey owl in the morning is bad.

CHAPTER XII

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

“The features that we find to predominate are excess of jaws and mouth, thick lips pushed out by the projection of the jaws and teeth.....The fore-head is low and narrow, but not, as a rule, receding, and the eyes have nothing very peculiar about them, often bright and full with long lashes and straight set, sometimes small and dim but not oblique..... The colour of the majority is of the darkest brown, almost black, but the observer may not only pick out individuals in the crowd who are of complexion as light as the average Hindu”. (1872:250-251). These were the remarks made by Dalton⁶⁴ about the physical features of the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur. Roy described them as short statured, narrow headed (Dolico-cephalic) and broad nosed (Platyrrhine) people with dark brown complexion approaching black, hair black and coarse, occasionally tending to curl (wooly hair being rare and not altogether unknown); eyes medium sized and occasionally small, the colour of the iris dark without any obliquity in the axis of the eye-lids; and jaw somewhat projecting, with lips rather thick, and nose depressed at the root. (1915: 80-81).

The above views of Dalton and Roy provide some idea about the physical features of the kindred of the Sunderban Orāons living in Chotā-Nāgpur plateau.

In order to examine how far these characteristics are still

borne by the Sunderban Orāons, an anthropometric survey was carried out along with the ethnographic investigations. For the purpose of this survey one hundred subjects were measured, at random, all adults between ages 20 to 55. Martin's technique (*Lehrbuch der Anthropologie*) was throughout used for taking these measurements.

The data obtained by us are given in the following pages, and for the sake of comparison, the data obtained by earlier authors for the Orāons of other areas are also given side by side.

The data in the following tables are given in four series:—

Series : I. Data of the present study among the Orāons of Sunderban (1963).

Series : II. Risley's⁶⁵ data concerning the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur (1891),

Series : III. Basu's⁶⁶ figures about the Orāons of Chotā-Nāgpur (1933-34).

Series : IV. Majumder's⁶⁷ figures about the Orāons of Mirjapur U. P. (1949).

In addition to the above figures for the Orāons, some tables are given with figures for a few other tribes and castes, for a comparative picture.

TABLE : 1

SOMATOMETRIC MEASUREMENTS AND INDICES

(Collected during the present study)

Indices & Measure- ments (in m.m)	Mean \pm Stan- dard Error	Standard Devia- tion \pm Standard Error	Co-efficient of variation \pm Standard Error
1	2	3	4
Cephalic Index	76.74 \pm 0.42	4.27 \pm 0.30	5.44 \pm 0.38
Length-Height Index	67.42 \pm 0.51	5.14 \pm 0.51	7.63 \pm 0.54
Breadth-Height Index	88.74 \pm 0.75	7.49 \pm 0.53	8.57 \pm 0.61
Total Facial Index	88.76 \pm 0.55	5.53 \pm 0.39	6.24 \pm 0.44
Upper Facial Index	50.30 \pm 0.47	4.67 \pm 0.33	9.29 \pm 0.65
Nasal Index	76.83 \pm 0.62	6.24 \pm 0.44	8.15 \pm 0.57
Nasal Depth Index	51.00 \pm 0.47	4.70 \pm 0.33	9.75 \pm 0.69
Zugo-Frontal Index	77.72 \pm 0.38	3.84 \pm 0.27	4.94 \pm 0.35
Zugo-Mandibular Index	74.37 \pm 0.30	3.08 \pm 0.22	3.88 \pm 0.27
Stature	1619.06 \pm 5.15	51.55 \pm 3.64	3.18 \pm 0.22
Head Length	180.74 \pm 0.64	6.40 \pm 0.45	3.54 \pm 0.25
Head Breadth	137.04 \pm 0.57	5.66 \pm 0.40	4.13 \pm 0.29
Head Height	123.26 \pm 0.88	8.77 \pm 0.62	7.11 \pm 0.50
Minimum Frontal Diameter	103.48 \pm 0.85	8.48 \pm 0.59	8.19 \pm 0.58
Bizygomatic Breadth	129.36 \pm 0.51	5.09 \pm 0.36	3.93 \pm 0.28
Bigonial Breadth	102.72 \pm 0.42	4.24 \pm 0.37	4.13 \pm 0.36

1	2	3	4
Nasal Height	50.14 ± 0.66	3.32 ± 0.23	6.62 ± 0.47
Nasal Breadth	36.90 ± 0.22	2.24 ± 0.16	6.07 ± 0.43
Nasal Depth	23.14 ± 0.22	2.24 ± 0.16	9.67 ± 0.68
Total Facial Height	114.14 ± 0.58	5.83 ± 0.41	5.11 ± 0.36
Upper Facial Height	64.92 ± 0.40	4.00 ± 0.28	6.16 ± 0.43
Horizontal Cir. Head	527.84 ± 1.5	14.83 ± 1.05	2.81 ± 0.19
Chest Girth			
—Normal	832.60 ± 2.76	27.59 ± 1.95	3.32 ± 0.23
—Expanded	857.90 ± 2.75	27.48 ± 1.95	3.20 ± 0.23
Weight (in lbs)	106.22 ± 1.01	10.15 ± 0.72	9.57 ± 0.67

TABLE : 2

STATURE

Stature Class (in m.m)	Frequency Distribution (in percentage)			
	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Very short (1300-1499)	1	2	—	4
Short (1500-1599)	39	31	—	28
Below medium (1600—1639)	30	23	—	29
Medium (1640-1669)	16	27	—	18
Above medium (1670-1699)	8	12	—	14
Tall (1700-1799)	6	5	—	6
Very tall (1800-1999)	—	—	—	—
Giant (2000 and above)	—	—	—	—

TABLE: 3
COMPARISON OF STATURE

	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Total number of subjects measured	100	100	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	1619.06 \pm 5.15	1621.3 \pm 5.1	1618.0 \pm 3.3	1614.5 \pm 6.0
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	51.55	50.6	52.2	60.0
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	3.18	3.12	3.22	3.72

COMPARISON OF MEASUREMENTS AND INDICES ON HEAD

TABLE: 4

	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of subjects measured	100	100	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	180.74 \pm 0.64	184.61 \pm 0.59	186.20 \pm 0.39	189.43 \pm 0.65
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	6.40	5.90	6.27	6.06
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	3.54	3.19	3.37	3.20

TABLE: 5
HEAD BREADTH

	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of subjects measured	100	100	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	137.04 \pm 0.57	139.31 \pm 0.45	138.2 \pm 0.25	136.36 \pm 0.41
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	5.66	4.51	3.99	4.07
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	4.13	3.24	2.89	2.77

TABLE: 6
HEAD HEIGHT

	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of subjects measured	100	—	250	—
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	123.26 \pm 0.88	—	121.0 \pm 0.35	—
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	8.77	—	5.57	—
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	7.11	—	4.60	—

TABLE: 7

CEPHALIC INDEX

(Length-Breadth Index)

	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of subjects measured	100	100	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	76.74 \pm 0.42	75.37 \pm 0.34	74.32 \pm 0.19	74.37 \pm 0.28
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	4.27	3.36	3.06	2.84
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	5.44	4.46	4.12	3.39

TABLE : 8
CEPHALIC INDEX
(Length-Breadth Index)

Class (in m.m)	Series (Percentage Distribution)			
	I	II	III	IV
Hyper Dolichocephalic (- 70.4)	3	5	—	21
Dolichocephalic (70.5 - 75.9)	41	53	—	71
Mesocephalic (76.0 - 80.9)	48	35	—	7
Brachycephalic (81.0 - 85.4)	5	6	—	1
Hyper Brachycephalic (85.5 +)	3	1	—	—

TABLE : 9
LENGTH-HEIGHT INDEX

	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Total number of subjects measured	100	—	250	—
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m)	67.42 \pm 0.51	—	65.06 \pm 0.20	—
Standard Deviation (in m.m)	5.14	—	3.30	—
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m)	7.63	—	5.07	—

TABLE : 10
LENGTH-HEIGHT INDEX

Class (in m.m.)	Series (Percentage Distribution)			
	I	II	III	IV
Chamaecephalic (- 57.6)	2	—	—	—
Orthocephalic (57.7 - 62.5)	20	—	—	—
Hypsicephalic (62.6 +)	78	—	—	—

TABLE : 11
BREADTH-HEIGHT INDEX
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of subjects measured	100	—	250	—
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	88.74 \pm 0.75	—	87.62 \pm 0.27	—
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	7.49	—	4.30	—
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	8.57	—	4.91	—

TABLE : 12
BREADTH-HEIGHT INDEX
Class (in m.m.) Series

	I	II	III	IV
Tapeinocephalic (– 78.9)	16	—	2.4	—
Metriocephalic (79.0 – 84.9)	18	—	22.8	—
Acrocephalic (85.0 +)	66	—	74.8	—

COMPARISON OF MEASUREMENTS AND INDICES
ON FACE

TABLE : 13
TOTAL FACIAL HEIGHT
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of Subjects measured	100	—	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	114.14 \pm 0.58	—	115.80 \pm 0.35	113.38 \pm 0.65
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	5.83	—	5.65	6.55

	I	II	III	IV
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	5.11	—	4.88	5.78

TABLE : 14
UPPER FACIAL HEIGHT
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of Subjects measured	100	—	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	64.92 ± 0.40	—	63.10 ± 0.27	61.58 ± 0.42
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	4.00	—	4.39	4.19
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	6.16	—	6.96	6.80

TABLE: 15
BI-ZYGOMATIC BREADTH
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of subjects measured	100	100	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	129.36 ± 0.51	130.36 ± 0.37	130.70 ± 0.26	130.14 ± 0.48
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	5.09	3.73	4.18	4.81
Co-efficient of variation	3.93	2.89	3.20	3.69

TABLE: 16
BIGONIAL BREADTH
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of subjects measured	100	—	250	100

	I	II	III	IV
Mean \pm Standard				
Error (in m.m.)	102.72 \pm 0.42	—	100.00 \pm 0.31	97.30 \pm 0.48
Standard Deviation				
(in m.m.)	4.24	—	4.95	4.85
Co-efficient of				
variation	4.13	—	4.95	4.97

TABLE: 17
MINIMAL FRONTAL DIAMETER
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of				
subjects measured	100	100	250	—
Mean \pm Standard				
Error (in m.m.)	103.48 \pm 0.85	101.97 \pm 0.32	102.10 \pm 0.25	—
Standard Deviation				
(in m.m.)	8.48	3.19	3.94	—
Co-efficient of				
variation	8.19	3.13	3.86	—

TABLE: 18
TOTAL FACIAL INDEX
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Number of subjects				
measured	100	—	250	100
Mean \pm Standard				
Error (in m.m.)	88.76 \pm 0.55	—	88.74 \pm 0.32	87.42 \pm 0.55
Standard Deviation				
(in m.m.)	5.53	—	5.05	5.47
Co-efficient of varia-				
tion (in m.m.)	6.24	—	5.69	6.25

TABLE: 19
TOTAL FACIAL INDEX

Class (in m.m.)	Series (Percentage Distribution)			
	I	II	III	IV
Hypereuryprosopic (-78.9)	6	—	2.4	4
Euryprosopic (79.0-83.9)	16	—	14.8	25
Mesoprosopic (84.0-87.9)	38	—	26.0	29
Leptoprosopic (88.0-92.9)	24	—	37.2	24
Hyperleptoprosopic (93.0 +)	16	—	19.6	18

TABLE : 20

UPPER FACIAL INDEX
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Number of subjects measured	100	—	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	50.30 \pm 0.47	—	48.95 \pm 0.22	42.33 \pm 0.36
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	4.67	—	3.50	3.64
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	9.29	—	7.15	7.69

TABLE : 21

UPPER FACIAL INDEX

Class (in m.m.)	Series (Percentage Distribution)			
	I	II	III	IV
Hypereuryne (- 42.9)	4	—	—	9
Euryne (43.0 - 47.9)	30	—	—	49
Mesene (48.0 - 52.9)	54	—	—	34
Leptene (53.0 - 56.9)	7	—	—	8
Hyperleptene (57.0 +)	5	—	—	—

TABLE : 22
ZUGO-MANDIBULAR INDEX
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of Subjects measured	100	—	—	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	74.37 \pm 0.30	—	—	75.14 \pm 0.40
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	3.08	—	—	3.39
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	3.88	—	—	4.51

COMPARISON OF MEASUREMENTS AND INDICES
ON NOSE

TABLE : 23
NASAL HEIGHT
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of Subjects measured	100	100	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	50.14 \pm 0.66	46.26 \pm 0.26	48.70 \pm 0.19	47.54 \pm 0.33
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	3.32	2.61	3.04	3.32
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	6.62	5.64	6.24	6.98

TABLE : 24
NASAL BREADTH
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of Subjects measured	100	100	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	36.90 ± 0.22	39.89 ± 0.25	40.20 ± 0.16	37.66 ± 0.26
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	2.24	2.55	2.49	2.63
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	6.07	6.19	6.19	6.99

TABLE : 25
NASAL DEPTH
Series

	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of Subjects measured	100	—	250	100
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	23.14 ± 0.22	—	17.30 ± 0.11	20.60 ± 0.16
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	2.24	—	1.73	1.58
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	9.67	—	10.00	7.68

TABLE : 26
NASAL INDEX

	Series			
	I	II	III	IV
Total Number of Subjects measured	100	100	250	100*
Mean \pm Standard Error (in m.m.)	76.83 \pm 0.62	86.34 \pm 0.79	62.71 \pm 0.41	79.52 \pm 0.85
Standard Deviation (in m.m.)	6.24	7.89	6.51	8.47
Co-efficient of variation (in m.m.)	8.15	9.12	7.87	10.61

TABLE : 27
NASAL INDEX

Class (in m.m.)	Series (Percentage Distribution)			
	I	II	III	IV
Hyperleptorrhine (-54.9)	—	—	—	—
Leptorrhine (55.0-69.9)	16	—	—	10
Mesorrhine (70.0-84.9)	74	50	—	67
Chamaerhine (85.0-99.9)	10	41	—	20
Hyperchamaerhine (100.0+)	—	9	—	3

TABLE: 28
SHOWING THE AVERAGES OF DIFFERENT SOMATIC MEASUREMENTS
OF SOME TRIBES OF INDIA

Names of Tribes		Orāon	Kharia	Kol	Santal	Munda	Malpaharia	Santal	Santal
Locality		Sunderban	Chotā Nāgpur	Uttarpradesh	Bengal	Chotā Nāgpur	Bengal	Santal Parganas	Santal Parganas
No. of subjects measured by		100	78	32	100	100	100	100	100
		Das & Raia	Risley ⁶³	Risley ⁶⁹	Risley ⁷⁰	Risley ⁷¹	Risley ⁷²	Chatterjee & Kumar ⁷³	Biswas ⁷⁴
Stature		1619.06 ± 5.15	1601.0	1650.0	1614.0	1539.0	1577.0	1604.78 ± 6.74	1593.0 ± 5.40
Max. Head Lth.		130.74 ± 0.64	184.4	183.1	184.8	165.9	183.4	185.27 ± 0.65	185.0 ± 0.06
Max. Head Brth.		137.04 ± 0.57	137.4	132.6	140.7	138.6	139.1	138.35 ± 0.54	137.0 ± 0.05
Auricular Ht.		123.26 ± 0.88	129.8	127.2	128.5	129.2	126.5	123.37 ± 0.37	129.0 ± 0.10
Min. Frontal Bth.		103.48 ± 0.85	101.0	97.1	102.1	101.5	100.5	101.25 ± 0.60	100.2 ± 0.12
Max. Bizygo Bth.		129.36 ± 0.51	130.8	130.8	132.5	130.7	130.9	130.64 ± 0.32	130.0 ± 0.50
Bi-gonial Bth.		102.72 ± 0.42	—	—	—	—	—	97.29 ± 0.43	92.0 ± 0.60
Nasal Ht.		50.14 ± 0.66	45.3	44.0	45.7	44.7	44.1	48.30 ± 0.36	48.0 ± 0.40
Nasal Bth.		36.90 ± 0.22	40.1	36.2	40.6	40.2	41.0	37.80 ± 0.20	37.0 ± 0.30
Nasal Depth.		23.14 ± 0.73	—	—	—	—	—	16.30 ± 0.13	—
Sup. F. Height		64.92 ± 0.40	—	—	—	—	—	58.23 ± 0.41	71.0 ± 0.50
Total Facial Height		114.14 ± 0.58	—	—	—	—	—	111.76 ± 0.62	113.0 ± 0.50
Horizontal Circum.									
(Head)		527.84 ± 1.5	—	—	—	—	—	534.10 ± 0.12	—

TABLE : 29
COMPARISON OF MEASUREMENTS AND INDICES BETWEEN ORÃOONS OF
SUNDERBAN AND OTHER CASTES

	Name of communities				
	Orãoons (Das & Raha)	Bagdi (Risley) ⁷⁵	Pod (Risley) ⁷⁶	Sadgop (Risley) ⁷⁷	Rajbansi (Risley) ⁷⁹
Number of subjects measured	100	99	100	48	100
Mean Stature (in m.m.)	1619.06	1603.0	1625.0	1633.0	1607.0
Mean Auricular Height (in m.m.)	123.26	129.1	130.1	130.7	130.7
Mean Head Length (in m.m.)	180.74	181.5	183.2	182.6	186.2
Mean Head Breadth (in m.m.)	137.04	139.5	142.4	142.1	140.2
Mean Minimum Frontal Breadth (in m.m.)	103.48	101.4	101.2	100.9	102.1
Mean Bizygomatic Breadth (in m.m.)	129.36	128.2	129.2	127.7	132.0

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Mean Nasal Height (in m.m.)	50.14	46.7	49.1	49.6	48.0	48.9
Mean Nasal Breadth (in m.m.)	36.90	38.1	37.4	36.7	37.8	37.5
Mean Length Height Index (in m.m.)	67.42	74.1	66.8	66.7	67.4	66.5
Mean Nasal Index (in m.m.)	76.83	80.5	76.1	73.9	76.2	76.6
Mean Cephalic Index (in m.m.)	76.74	76.3	77.7	77.6	77.3	75.2

SOMATOSCOPIC OBSERVATION

SKIN-COLOUR

Due to the lack of skin colour chart of HAUTFARBEN-TAFEL of Von Luschan, we had to rely on naked eye observation for grading of the skin colour of these people. In our estimation, 73% were found bearing dark brown skin colour and the remaining with light brown colour. According to Basu,⁸⁰ (who carried on this work with the aforesaid chart in 1959-60 among the Orāons in Sunderban area), No-30 (Martin does not suggest any descriptive form for this colour, which however, agrees closely with No-31 described by Martin as 'Dark Brown', and as such, may be counted with the latter) has the highest frequency (38%). It is followed by No-32 (Reddish Brown—18%), No-25 (light brown—16%) and No-23 (light Brown—15%). In the colour of inner aspect of the arm the highest frequency (25%) occurs in No-25 (light brown).

HAIR FORM

The Orāons of Sunderban, in majority of the cases (81%), possess low waves, and the rest of them have deep waves.

HAIR TEXTURE

In 62% of the cases the hair of the Orāons of Southern Bengal has medium texture and in the remaining cases, it is somewhat coarse.

HAIR COLOUR

Basu,⁸¹ (working with hair colour chart of HAARFARBEN-TAFEL of Fischer) found 42% belonging to No-27, 41% to No-28 and 16% having grey hair.

EYE-COLOUR

Basu⁸² (who examined eye colour against AUGENFARBEN-TAFEL of Martin and Schultz) is of opinion that highest

frequency (42%) is present in No-13 (Brown) which is followed by No-14 (Dark brown 24%) and No-15 (Deep dark brown-25%). No-11 and No-12 have insignificant frequencies.

IRIS

In majority of the cases (64%) the iris is homogenous. In 31% the eyes are rayed and in 5% it is speckled.

SCLERA

In most of the cases (97%) the sclera is dull.

EYE-SLIT

Among all the subjects observed and examined, the eye-slit is straight, no obliquity being observed among them.

EYE-FOLD

No eye-fold or epicanthic fold is present among these people of Sunderban.

EYE-BROW

Eye-brows in majority of the cases (82%) are medium, in 12% these are thin and in 6% thick.

In majority of the cases (86%) the brows are separated, in 10% these are somewhat connected and in the remaining cases, marked connection may be noticed.

SUPRA-ORBITAL RIDGE

In 85% of the cases the supra-orbital ridge is imperceptible, whereas in 11% of the cases it occurs as traces. Moderate ridge may be noticed in the rest of the cases.

NASION DEPRESSION

Shallow depression may be noticed in a remarkable number

of cases (63%) which is followed by medium (33%) and deep (4%).

NASAL BRIDGE

Nasal bridge among majority of the Orāons (82%) is straight, in 16% it is concave and in 2% convex.

NASAL SEPTUM

Horizontal nasal septum is prevalent in a large number of Orāons (56%) In 32% it slants upwards and in 12% downwards.

FOREHEAD

SLOPE

Slope is medium in 53% of the cases and straight is 45%. Marked slope is present only in 2% of the cases.

HEIGHT

In majority of the cases (65%) the height of the forehead is medium. High heightened forehead is present only in 30% cases. It is low in the remaining cases.

BREADTH

Breadth of the forehead is medium in most of the cases (74%), broad forehead which is not uncommon, is present in 19% of the cases. Narrow forehead is insignificant (7%).

LIPS

Thick lips are the characteristic of the Orāons of Sunderban. It is present in 85% of the cases, though medium lips are present in 15%.

LIPS-EVERSION

In 48% of the cases eversion is absent, but in 51% of the cases slight eversion may be noticed.

CHIN

Chin is oval (71%) and of medium development (89%), though square (14%) and pointed (12%) chins are not infrequent. Prominently developed chin is present in 11% of the cases.

PROGNATHISM

Prognathism is absent in majority of the cases (71%), but slight prognathism is present in 18%, 10% of whom show alveolar prognathism.

EAR LOBE

Among 58% of the Orāons of Sunderban the ear lobe is attached and in 42% it is separated.

INCISOR FOLD

In majority of the cases (95%), the incisor fold is slight; in 4% it is medium.

BODY MUSCULATURE

Body musculature is medium among a large number of Orāons (81%), weak in 10% and is markedly weak in 3%.

In general the following observations may be made about the Orāons of Sunderban.

69%—Short and/or medium statured.

89% — Dolico and/or meso cephalled.

78% — Hypsicephalled.

66% — Acrocephalled.

38% — Mesoprosopy.

54% — Mesene.

74% — Mesorrhine.

Somaťoscopically it is seen from the present study that in the majority of cases skin colour on forehead is dark brown (No. 30) and in the inner arm light brown (No. 25), hair low wavy and between No. 27 and No. 28; eyes brown (No. 13)

with straight slit ; forehead medium sloped to straight ; nasal depression shallow to medium and nasal bridge straight ; lips thick and slightly everted and musculature medium.

The comparative study of the physical characteristics of the Orāons show that there are some differences between the data of our study and those of the earlier investigators in certain respects. It is not possible to state definitely how far environmental influences are responsible for the differences between the Orāons of Sunderban and of other areas (Chotā-Nāgpur and Mirjapur) unless intensive work in wider perspective is undertaken. Some differences are also noticeable in the data of different investigators of Chotā Nagpur Orāons too. It would be interesting to know the factors responsible for these differences.

ABO BLOOD GROUPS AMONG THE ORAONS OF SUNDERBAN

The serological data (published by different authors) are given in Tables 30 and 31 (pp. 404 and 405). From Table 30, we get the results as follows:—

X^2 between I and V — 19.37

X^2 between II and V — 0.30

X^2 between III and V — 0.76

X^2 between IV and V — 0.00

X^2 between I and III — 13.52

It is apparent from Table 30 as also from the values of X^2 that, except No. 1 (Ranchi Orāons by Sarkar), the Nazat (Sunderban) Orāons agree with the Orāons of other areas (Nos. 11, 111 and IV) both at 1% and 5% level. The difference between I and V is significant, whereas that between I and III is insignificant.

TABLE : 30
THE ABO BLOOD GROUP OF THE ORĀONS OF NAZAT (SUNDERBAN)
AND ALSO OF OTHER AREAS.

Names of the tribes		Mixed (Munda, Orāon & Santāl)				
		Orāon	Orāon	Ranchi III	Ranchi IV	Orāon Nazat (Sunderban) V
Locality :		Ranchi I	Palamau II	Ranchi III	Ranchi IV	Orāon Nazat (Sunderban) V
Number of Subjects		155	115	125	589	111
Investigated by :		Sarkar ⁸³	Sarkar ⁸⁴	Kirk & Others ⁸⁵	Malone & Lahari ⁸⁶	Ray ⁸⁷
Year		1942-43	1949	1963	1928-29	1962
Phenotype	O	47.10	26.09	25.6	24.3	24.32
Frequency	A	12.90	27.83	28.8	27.5	27.92
	B	34.84	33.91	38.4	36.8	36.93
	AB	5.16	12.17	7.2	11.4	10.81
Gene	p	0.088	0.233	0.20	0.22	0.218
Frequency	q	0.219	0.274	0.27	0.28	0.278
	r	0.686	0.501	0.53	0.50	0.483
	D/σ	-0.66	-0.09	1.66	0.90	1.8

TABLE : 31

PHENOTYPE AND GENOTYPE FREQUENCIES OF ORĀONS COMPARED
WITH OTHER ALLIED ETHNIC GROUPS.

Communities & Locality	Orāon Nazat (Sunder- ban)	Munda Besajunda (Sing- bhūm)	Munda Nazat (Sunder- ban)	Santal	Birhor	Ho	
Number of Subjects	111	120	27	407	102	186	
Investigated by	Ray ⁸³	McFarlane ⁸⁹	Ray ⁹⁰	Sarkar & Sen ⁹¹	Majumdar ⁹²	Majumdar ⁹³	
Year	1962	1941	1962	—	1950	1950	
Phenotype	O	24.32	33.33	7.40	31.70	31.4	34.9
Frequency	A	27.92	30.00	22.22	21.38	35.3	31.7
	B	36.93	29.17	51.85	35.63	23.5	28.0
	AB	10.81	7.50	18.51	11.30	9.8	5.4
Gene Fre- quency	p	0.218	0.219	0.231	0.166	.258	.208
	q	0.278	0.214	0.456	0.258	.183	.185
	r	0.483	0.577	0.272	0.563	.558	.605
D/σ		1.8	0.6	1.5	—	—	—

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made to present the materials about the Orāons of Sunderban in a systematic way and discussions have been made in detail, as far as possible to build up a true societal profile of these people in their new environment. This gives a fairly comprehensive picture of the different aspects of their life and activities.

Along with the above, a picture of the Orāons of Ranchi area regarding the aspect under discussion in each chapter, has also been presented in short in order to show, how far these Orāons of Sunderban have deviated from their traditional culture, and to what extent they have absorbed newer traits and attuned and adjusted themselves to the new environment and have assumed a new cultural pattern. This, we hope, will be of particular interest to those who are keen about the study of the process of integration and acculturation.

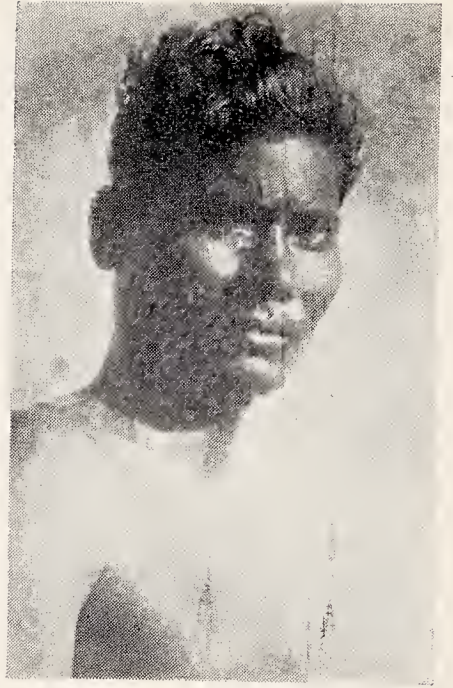
The data have been presented and discussions made in each chapter of the book, in a way as would be helpful to different categories of personnel working for and among these people. This work is expected to remove a long-felt need for a suitable monographic handbook, as no systematic and scientific data about the present-day conditions of these Orāons were available. Due to paucity of such data about this tribal

group of Sunderban more emphasis has been laid on the descriptive ethnographic side to formulate a base line rather than going into detail in the analytical aspect, though the analytical side has not been altogether sidetracked, but dealt with where it has been felt necessary. This would be particularly helpful for further detailed studies, both academic as well as applied, on specific aspects of the life and culture of these people.

Apart from the above, this book is likely to be helpful in creating a better understanding between peoples of different culture groups.

PHOTOGRAPHS





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APPENDIX—I

A GLOSSARY OF SOME LOCAL TERMS

- Ādibāsi*—Literal meaning original settlers; usually applied to tribal people.
- Āhir*—Caste engaged in milk business and cattle rearing.
- Ākās*—Sky.
- Ākhrā*—Village Common meeting ground usually utilised for dancing etc.
- Āl*—Slightly raised bund around a field for retaining water.
- Ālpanā*—Decoration of the floor with paste of rice powder and water.
- Āltā*—Red paint usually applied to the margin of the soles of the feet of women as an item of decoration.
- Amāwās*—New-moon night.
- Annaprāsan*—First rice giving ceremony.
- Āshirbād*—Blessing.
- Āurrung*—Gathering house.
- Baithaki*—Musical programmes held in a common gathering place.
- Ban*—Forest.
- Bāndh*—embankment.
- Bandhu*—Friend (male).
- Bandhuni*—Friend (female).
- Bānmārā*—Secret magical rite designed for causing harm to a person.
- Baran*—Formal reception.
- Bargādār*—Tenure holder of land.
- Bāsibihā*—After marriage rites.
- Bātāsh*—Air.
- Benjā*—Negotiation type of marriage.
- Bhāgchās*—Cultivation by share cropper.
- Bhāgchāsis*—Share cropper.

- Bhagwān*—God.
- Bhakat*—Devotee.
- Bhāt*—Cooked rice.
- Bhut*—Ghost.
- Bihā, Biye*—Marriage.
- Bihā Khānā*—Marriage feast.
- Boistom*—Colloquial name for persons of the *Baisnab* sect-worshippers of Lord Viṣṇu.
- Bowlee*—Woodcutters.
- Brahma*—The First member of the Hindu Trinity.
- Buno*—Literal meaning wild ; generally applied to tribals living in the forest area.
- Burāburi*—Literal meaning old man and old lady ; usually applied to ancestral spirits.
- Chadāk*—Celebration on the last day of *Chaitra* (March-April) usually associated with the worship of Lord *Siva*.
- Chakdār*—A type of tenure holder.
- Chālpāḍa*—Charging rice with magical power by incantations.
- Chhāri*—Divorce.
- Chitā*—Funeral pyre.
- Choukidār*—Literal meaning village watchman ; usually used to denote the messenger of the village *Panchāyet*.
- Choukidāri*—Fee for the *Choukidār*.
- Cooli*—Porter
- Dāin*—Witch.
- Daitya*—Demon.
- Dākini*—A frightful female spirit.
- Daksin*—South.
- Dāi*—cooked pulse.
- Deochālā*—Shade for the deities.
- Deotā*—Deity.
- Deothān*—Place for the deities.
- Devisthān*—Place for the Goddess.
- Dhāi*—Midwife.
- Dhān-Durbā*—Rice grains and blades of *Durbā* grass (Eynoden dactylon), usually for blessings.
- Dhāngar*—Young bachelors.
- Dhāngarbāsā*—Bachelor's dormitory.
- Dhāp*—step.

- Dhulaparā*—Charming dust with magical powers.
Dhumkuriā—Bachelor's dormitory for Orāons in Ranchi.
Gājan—A type of worship of Lord *Siva*.
Gangājal—Sacred water of the Ganges.
Gāon-deotī—Village Goddess.
Geet—Songs.
Ghardijoā—Son-in-law residing at father-in-law's place.
Gharjāmāl—Same as *Ghardijoā*.
Goāl—Cattleshed.
Goālā—Caste engaged in milk business and cattle rearing.
Golā—Store house for grains.
Gctor, Gotro—Clan, Sib.
Grām—Village.
Grāmbāndhā—Protecting the village by magical rites.
Grāmsabhā—Village assembly.
Grāmthān—Place for village deity.
Grihaprabesh—Ceremonial entry into a new house.
Gunin—Medicineman.
Guru—Preceptor.
Gurumukh—One initiated by 'Guru' with a particular *mantra*.
Habisya—Simple vegetarian food.
Hāndiā—Home brewn liquor.
Hāt—Marketplace.
Haṭyā—Continued sṭay with a prayerful poṣe before a deity
with a specific prayer.
Iār—Intimate friend (male).
Iārin—Intimate friend (female).
Indra—King of the Gods—Controller of thunder and lightning.
Jal—Water.
Jāmāisaṣṭhi—Ceremonial entertainment of a bridegroom on
the sixth day after the new moon in the month of
Jaistha (April-May).
Jāt—Caste.
Jātrā—A type of village drama.
Jhārphuk—Magical rite aimed at relieving some distress.
Jhumur—A type of rhythmic song.
Jogini—Fearful female spirit.
Jonkh—Bachelor.

- Jonkh-erpā*—Bachelor's dormitory for Orāons in Ranchi.
Jotedār—Lease holder.
Kāhini—Story.
Kailās—A mountain peak of Himalayas regarded as the abode of Lord *Sivā*.
Kāk—Crow.
Kālaharin—Literal meaning black deer ; usually applied to pigs.
Kālīsāadhanā—Special devotion to goddess *Kālī*.
Kālṛātri—Night of the next day after marriage; newly-wed couple prohibited from meeting on this night.
Kāmār—Blacksmith caste.
Kānbindhā—Ear piercing.
Kanyā—Daughter.
Kartā—Head of the family.
Khāl—Canal.
Khāprā—Country tiles used for roofing.
Kirāta—A hunter ; usually mentioned in the mythological stories.
Kirtan—Singing of religious songs in praise of a particular deity.
Krisak, Krisān—Cultivator.
Kuber—The mythological God in charge of store of wealth.
Lotdār—A type of tenure holder.
Lugā—Cloth.
Mad—Wine.
Mahādeothān—The seat of Lord *Siva*.
Mahādeomanda—Shrine of Lord *Siva*.
Mānava—Mankind.
Mangal Kābya—Poems in praise of a deity or mythological hero.
Mantra—Incantations.
Manṭradān—Initiation of a disciple with a specific type of prayer.
Mantri—Adviser ; usually of the village headman.
Masān—Cremation or burial ground.
Mati—Magician.
Mlechhas—Unbelievers in hindu mythology.
Moral—Headman.

Mukheāgun—Setting fire to the face-end of the funeral pyre to initiate cremation.

Mukhebhāt—Ceremonial rice feeding given to a child for the first time.

Nabānna—Meal prepared with the newly harvested rice.

Najar—An inauspicious look believed to be harmful.

Nākbindhā—Nose piercing.

Namaskār—Bowling before a superior with folded hands.

Nāmkiṛtan—Singing songs in praise of a deity.

Nāpit—Person belonging to the barber caste.

Nāpti—Service rendered by a barber in connection with a ceremony.

Narak—Hell.

Nāvi—Literal meaning navel; usually applied to a mass of charred bowels remaining at the end of cremation.

Nawākhāni—Meal prepared with the newly harvested crop.

Neye—A surname or title of priest (Orāon).

Nishidākā—A call supposed to have come from a supernatural agency, late at night, often believed to lead to harmful effects.

Nitbar—An associate of the bridegroom serving as the 'best man'.

Nonā—Salty.

Ojhā—Village Priest.

Olā—The Goddess regulating Cholera epidemic.

Pāhān—Village Priest.

Pāhānāin—Village Priest's wife.

Pāhār—Hill.

Paitā—Sacred thread usually worn by Brahmins or persons of priestly class.

Pa'i—Silt

Pānch—Committee of village elders.

Pānchālī—Poems in praise of a particular deity.

Pānchāyet—Committee of village elders.

Pāntābhāt—Cooked rice soaked in water kept overnight.

Pārā—Hamlet.

Parab—Festival.

Parganā—A territorial unit consisting of several villages.

Paschim—West.

Pātāl—Literal meaning underground region; believed to be abode of some mythological agents.

Pātṭā—A type of lease deed.

Pel-erpā—Maiden's dormitory of the Orāons of Choṭā-Nāgpur.

Petni, *Petini*—An evil-doing female spirit.

Phāgu—Literal meaning month of *Phālgun* (February-March); usually applied to the Spring festival.

Phirunineyā—Return visit; usually of the bride to her father's place, after the first journey to her father-in-law's place.

Phulsayā—The ceremonial meeting of the newly-wed couple on the second night after marriage in a bed usually decorated with flower.

Pir—A Muslim saint.

Pithā—Cake.

Prasād—Portion of offerings after the worship of a deity is over; supposed to convey the deity's blessings to the person receiving it.

Pujā—Worship.

Pukur—Tank.

Purab—East.

Pusputra—Foster son.

Rāiyat—Tenant.

Rāiyatwāri—Under Tenancy right.

Rāj—Reign.

Rājā—King.

Rājmorā—Village headman.

Rākṣas—Demon.

Rakshā—The Saviour; usually applied to a particular God or Goddess.

Rāmāyan—The epic poem describing the life and exploits of *Rāmchandra* the mythological Hero God.

Rāmchandra—The hero of epic poem '*Rāmāyan*'.

Raṭhājātrā—Ceremonial tour of a deity in a chariot.

Rāvan—The demon king of *Lankā* defeated and slain by *Rāmchandra*.

Rāwānapuṭ—Descendants of *Rāvan*.

Sādhu—An ascetic ; a saintly person.

Sāgar—Sea.

Sāheb—A respectable term of address for a prominent person.

Sampradān—Ceremonial handing over; usually of the bride to the bridegroom. 12

Samudra—Sea.

Sangi—Companion ; associate (male).

Sangin—Companion ; associate (female).

Sanyās—Literally meaning asceticism ; usually applied to worshippers of Lord *Siva* during the special season of *Siva puja*.

Sarsepara—Charging mustard seeds with special magical power with incantations and using the same for detection and/or treatment against an evil spirit.

Sasthitalā—The site for the Goddess *Sasthi*, the guardian deity for infants' welfare.

Sabha—Meeting.

Senāpati—Leader of the army.

Sikkā—Scar marks ; usually given to young boys.

Sinni—Same as *prasād*.

Sitā—Wife of *Rāmchandra*, hero of the epic *Rāmāyana*.

Sitalātalā—The site of the Goddess *Sitalā* controlling Small Pox.

Smasān—Burial or Cremation ground.

Śrādh—Ceremonial worshipping after death for the peace of the departed soul.

Subhadristi—Literal meaning auspicious look ; applied to the rite of ceremonially looking at each other for the first time by the married couple.

Sugriva—A king of the monkey army who helped *Rāmachandra* in his fight against *Rāvan*.

Sundari—Literal meaning beautiful; usually applied to a type of timber tree commonly found in the *Sunderban*.

Sup—Winnowing fan.

Surajdeotā—Sun God.

Swarga—Heaven.

Tānti—A person of the weaver caste.

Tapan—Worship of a deity with offerings of water.

- Tārakeswar*—A well known pilgrimage place for worshippers of Lord *Siva*.
- Telpara*—Charging mustard oil with special magical power with incantations and using the same for dejection and/or treatment against an evil spirit.
- Thākur*—A deity.
- Trisul*—A trident; usually the weapon carried by Lord *Siva*.
- Tulsi*—Sacred basil plant (*Oscimum bacilicum*).
- Tulsijal*—Water with sacred basil leaves dipped therein; usually supposed to sanctify articles over which this is sprayed.
- Tulsimancha*—The platform for the sacred basil plant.
- Unmatta*—Maddened.
- Ut̐tar*—North.
- Vāhana*—The animal specifically used by a god/goddess as draught animal for travel from place to place.
- Vaisnab*—Same as *Boistom*.
- Vānara*—Monkey.
- Visnu*—The second of the Gods of the Hindu Trinity.
- Yājñā*—A type of worship with offerings of clarified butter to a burning heap of wood.
- Yāksa*—A supernatural agent.
- Yāksini*—A female supernatural agent.

APPENDIX II

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